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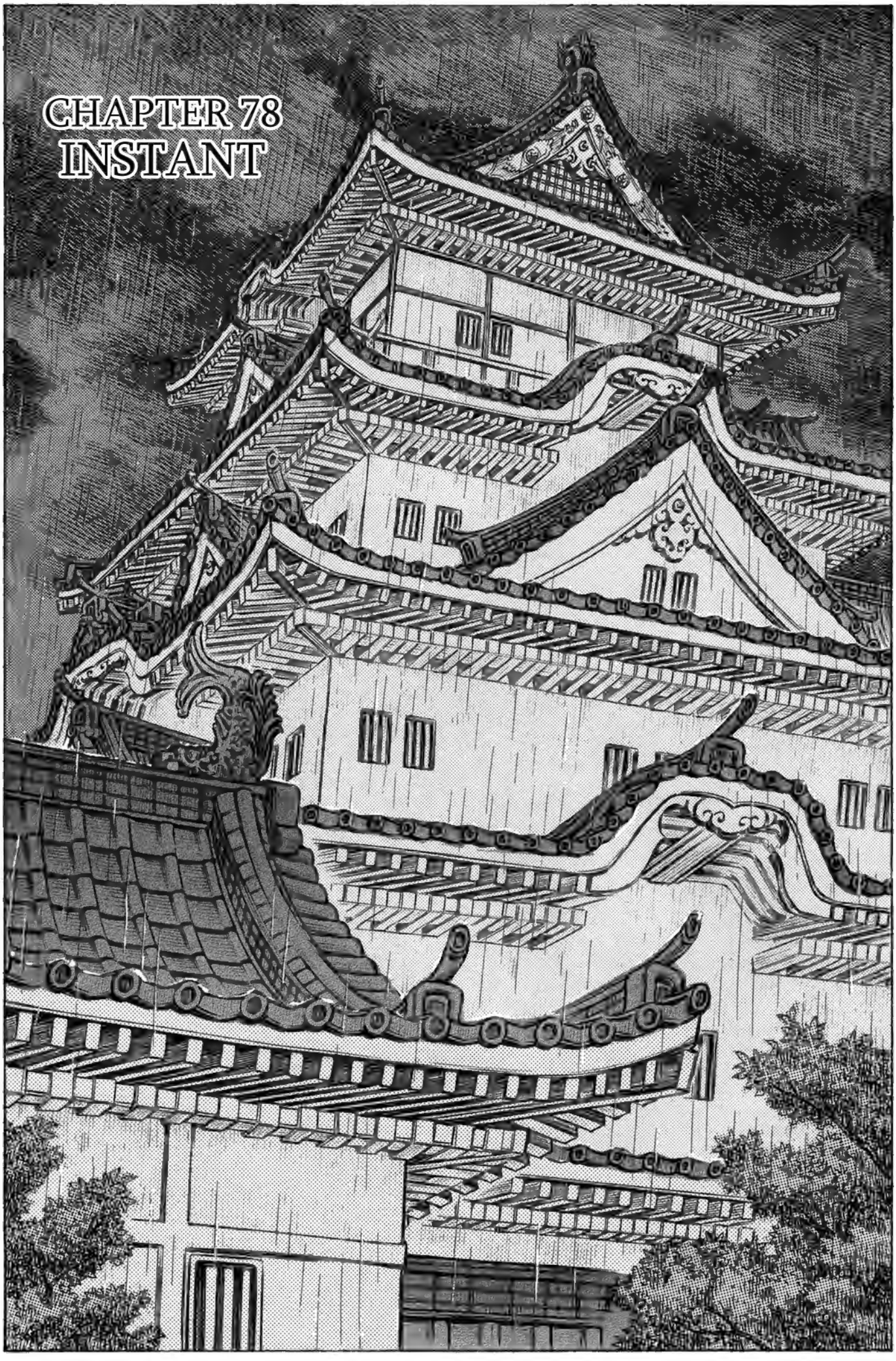
Previously:
The tournament arrives at last. The Suruga Dainagon Tadanaga stabs one of the assembled swordsmen. The swiftly flowing blood is a prelude to the terrible violence of the coming battle...

This is a work of fiction. There is no relation to any real individuals or associations.


CHAPTER 78
INSTANT

THE DAY OF THE AUDI-ENCE,
GENNO-SUKE AND SHUUZA-BUROU HURRIED HOME WITHOUT UMBRELLAS.

WE'RE BACK!

MASTER, WELCOME HOME.

FUJIKI-SAMA...

HA, WE'RE REALLY SOAKED!

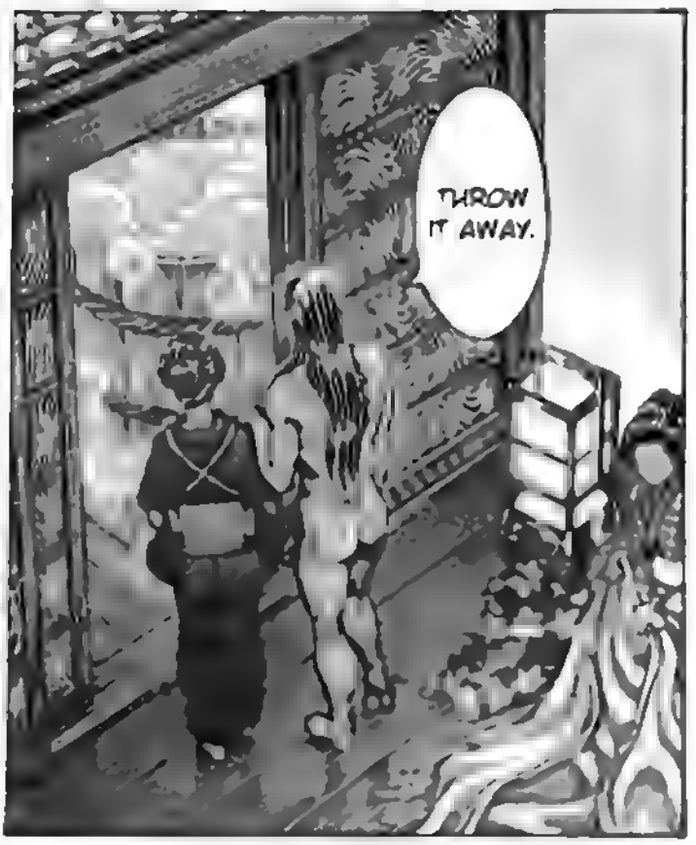
HIS NEW CERE-MONIAL ROBES WERE COVERED WITH MUD.

HE DID NOT SEEM LIKE A WARRIOR WHO HAD TRIPPED AND FALLEN IN THE MUD,

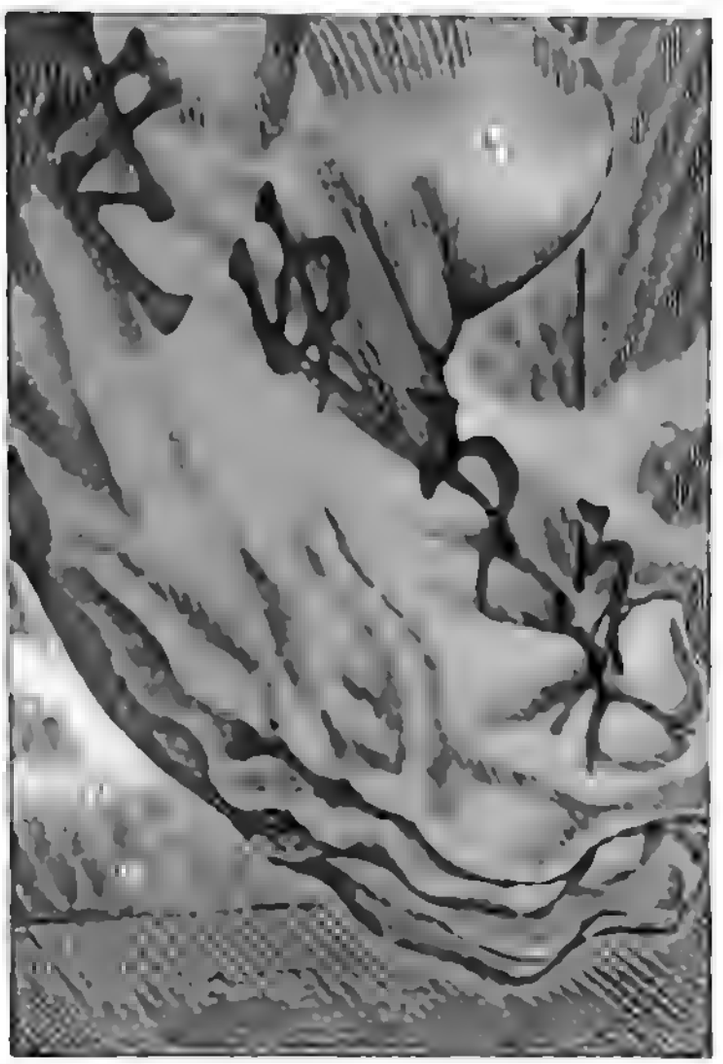
BUT LIKE A SUR-VIVOR FROM A BATTLE-FIELD.

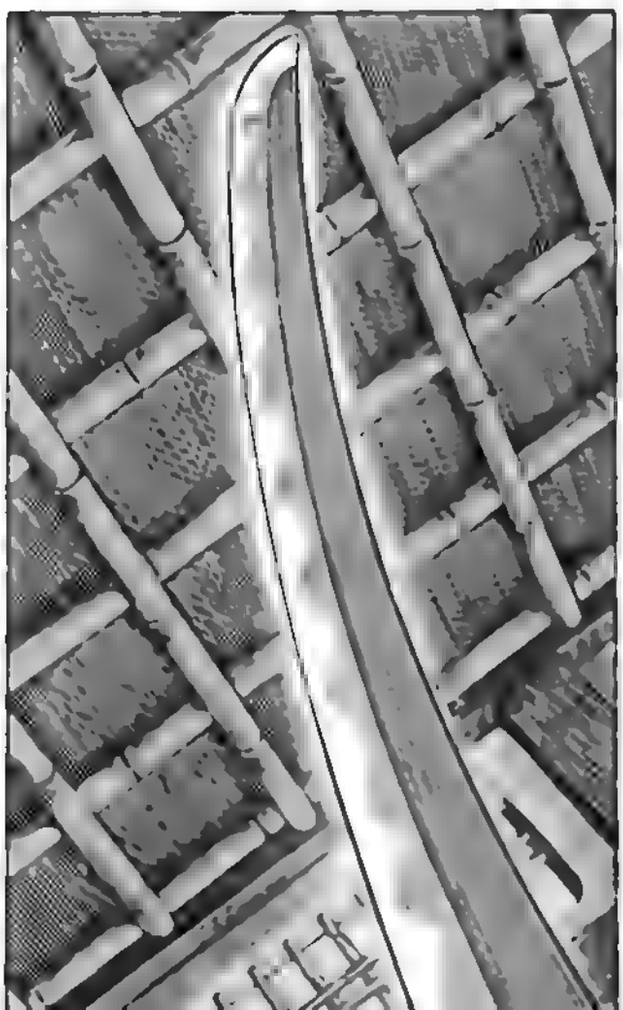
MEAN-
WHILE,
SEIGEN
WELCOME
HOME

It was a truly pleasant audience.
YOUR BATH IS PREPARED.


THROW IT AWAY.

THE MADNESS OF THE SUNUGA ZANAGUN HAS GONE TOO FAR
FOR ALL THAT HE IS THE SHOGUN'S YOUNGER BROTHER
THE IMPERIAL COURT WILL NOT ALLOW THIS TO CONTINUE INDEFINITELY.





KANAOKA ...
IS THIS TRULY A SWORD UNRIVALED UNDER HEAVEN?
SEIGEN-DONO,
THERE CAN BE NO MISTAKE.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN!

CON-VERSELY, IT IS FAV-ORABLE FOR YOU, MY LORD.

THERE IS NO FUTURE FOR SURUGA'S 550,000 KOKU...

THE INNS AROUND SUNPU ARE ALL FILLED TO THE RAFTERS WITH LODGERS.
THE TENANTS ARE ALL DAIMYO OF CLANS FROM OTHER PROVINCES,

HOSTED BY LORD TADAN-AGA,
SO THEY MAY ATTEND THE TOUR-NAMENT ON SEPTEMBER 24TH.

THE FAME OF YOUR SWORD WILL SPREAD THROUGHOUT THE REALM IN A SINGLE DAY.

AT WORST, IF THE DAINAGON'S LINE IS DESTROYED,
YOUR FAME WILL REMAIN INTACT.
IN EITHER OWARI OR KISHUU, THE PATH TO WHATEVER EMPLOYMENT YOU DESIRE WILL BE OPEN TO YOU.

EDO ...
I WILL USE THE SURUGA DAINAGON AS A STEPPING STONE FOR ASCENT TO EDO

THE TOKUGAWA CLAN IN OWARI THE TOKUGAWA CLAN IN KISHUU
BOTH FAR EXCEEDED THE STATUS OF THE SUNPU CLAN

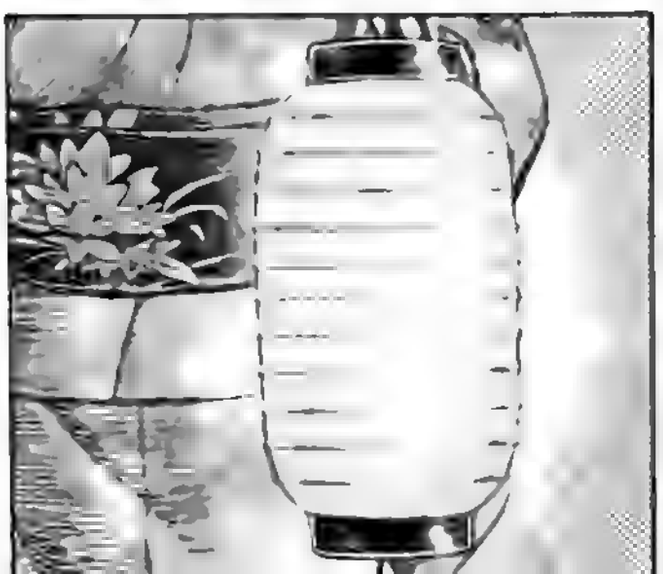
WHEN THE BLIND DRAGON WAS REMINDED OF THE SCENERY OF EDO
CONTROLLED BY SHOGUN IEMITSU

EVEN IKU, WHO HAD NEVER VISITED EDO
SAW IN HER MIND'S EYE THE EXACT SAME SCENE AS SEIGEN RECALLED

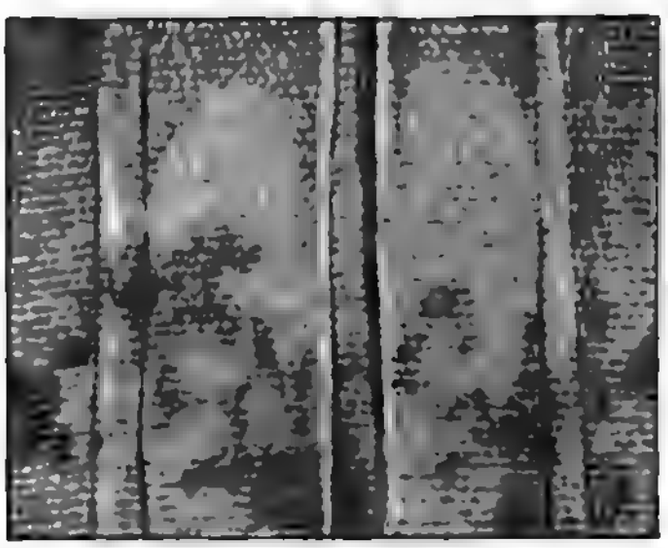
FUJIKI-SENSEI!
WATER IS BEST FOR GETTING OUT MUD STAINS.

THE SWORDSMAN WHOSE LIFE HAD BEEN SUDDENLY CUT SHORT AT THE AUDIENCE.
JUST LIKE GENNOSUKE.
HE TOO SURELY HAD OPPONENTS TO FIGHT AND A HOUSE TO PROTECT

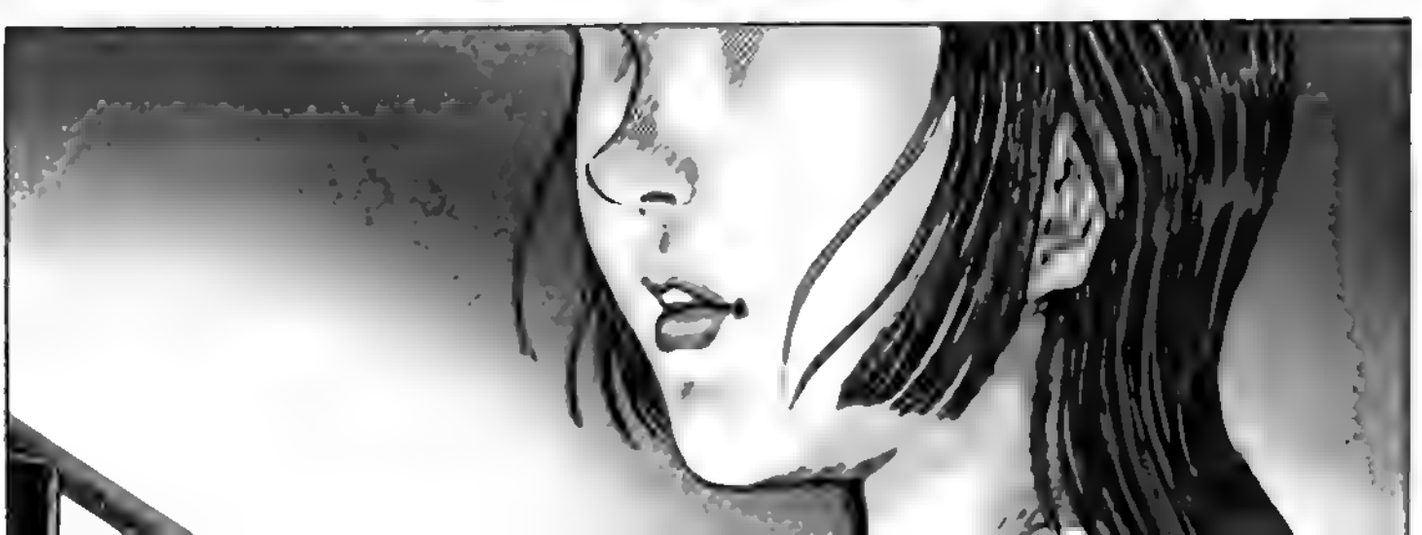
IT OCCURRED TO GENNOSUKE,



WHEN HE REALIZED THAT,
HIS OWN EXISTENCE WAS FLEETING, AND MIGHT FLY AWAY IN AN INSTANT



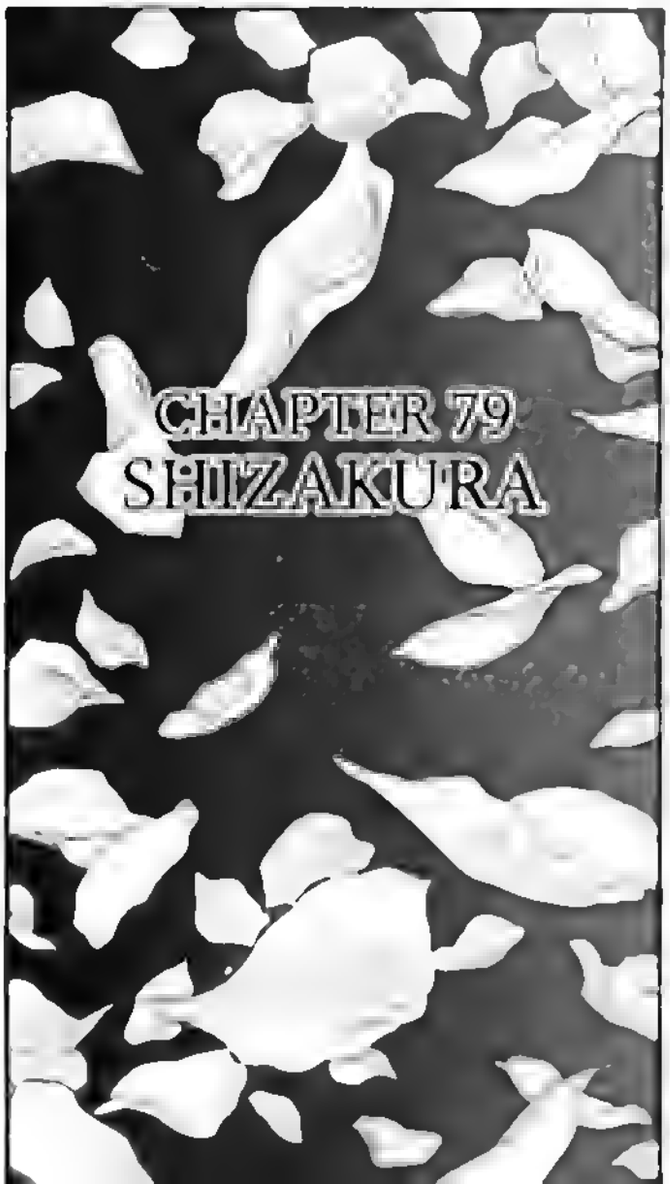
THAT EVEN IF THE MUD COULD BE CLEANSED FROM HIS
THE BLOOD STAINS WOULD NOT WASH AWAY

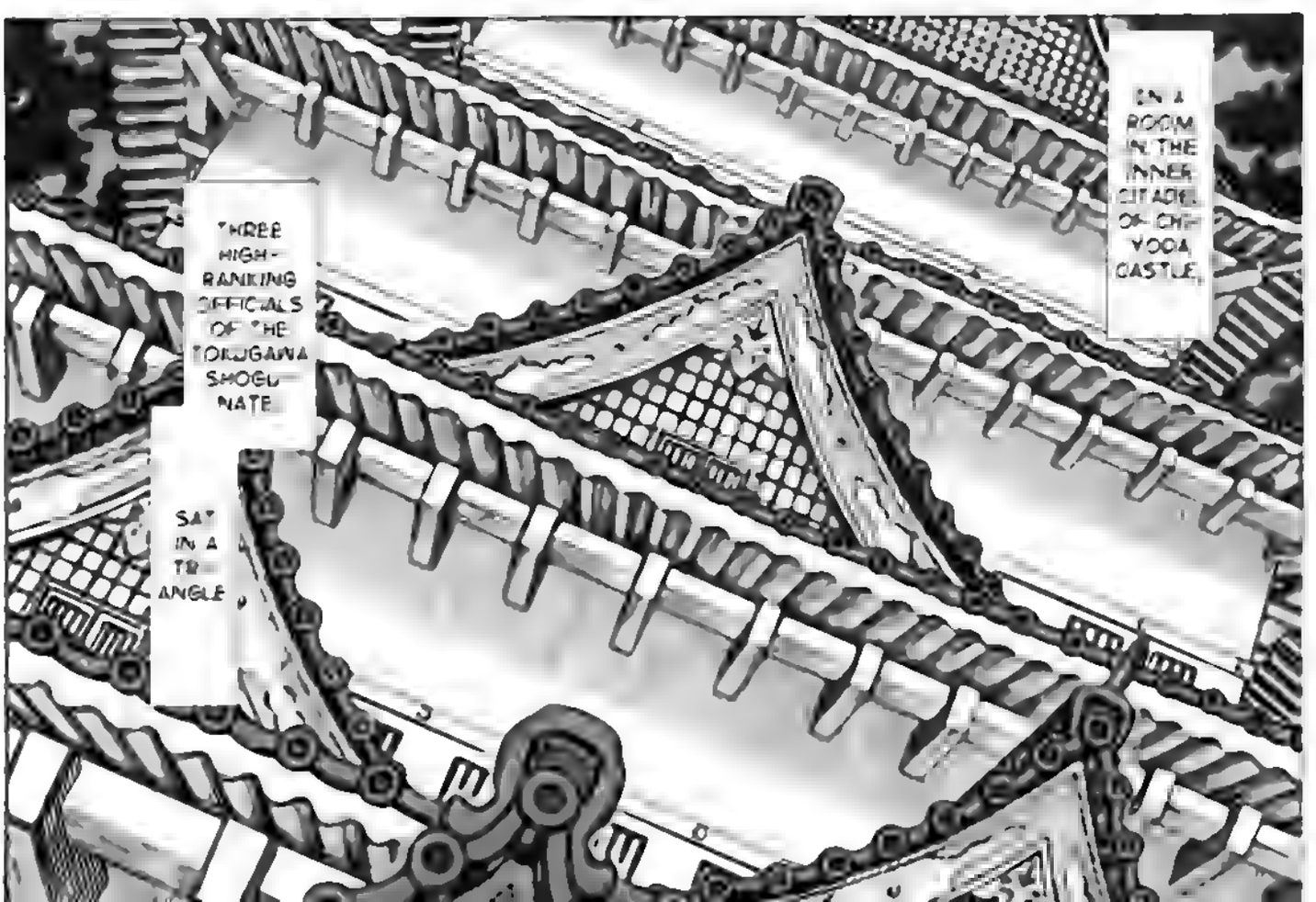


On that night, I will become your wife.

Please kill him.

SEPTEMBER 23RD,
EDO.


CHAPTER 79
SHIZAKURA


IN A ROOM IN THE INNER CITADEL OF CHIYODA CASTLE,
THREE HIGH-RANKING OFFICIALS OF THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE
SAT IN A TRIANGLE

THE DAIMYO OF UMAYA-BASHI IN KOUZUKE PROVINCE, WORTH 122,000 KOKU,
AND COUNSELOR TO THE YOUNG SHOGUN IEMITSU
SAKAI TADAYO, LORD OF UTA,
LADY KASUGA,
SHOGUN IEMITSU'S FORMER NURSE, NOW IN CHARGE OF THE LADIES' CHAMBERS

DOI TOSHI-KATSU, LORD OF OOI,
THE DAIMYO OF KOGA IN SHIMOUSA PROVINCE, WORTH 132,000 KOKU, AND THE MOST INFLUENTIAL MAN IN THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE

JUST WHAT IS CHIKUGO DOING.

SOMEHOW, MEASURES MUST BE TAKEN...

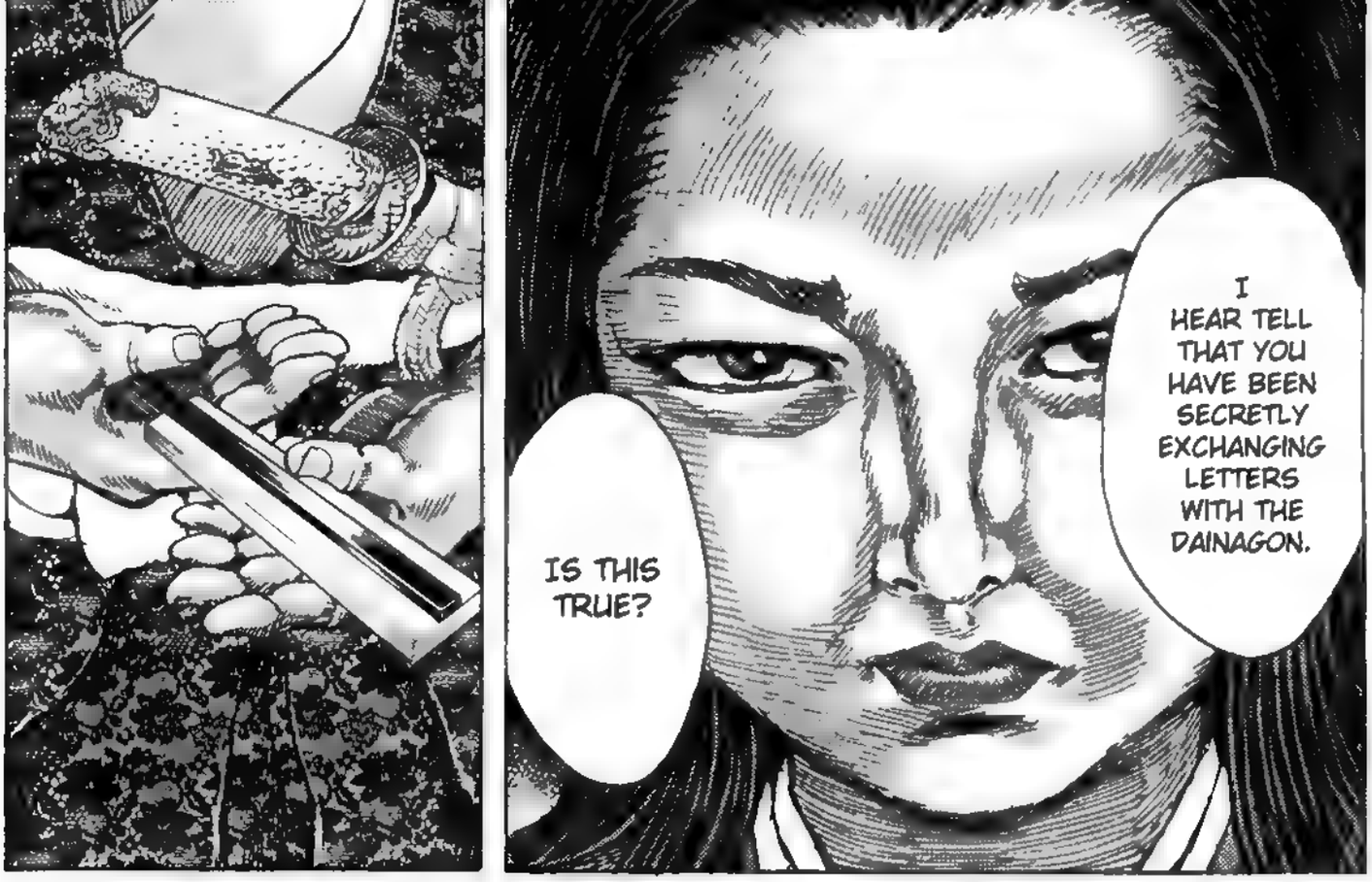
CHIKUGO WAS LORD ASAKURA CHIKUGO,
THE HEAD COUNSELOR WHO HAD BEEN TAKEN FROM THE SHOGUNATE BY THE SURUGA DAINAGON.

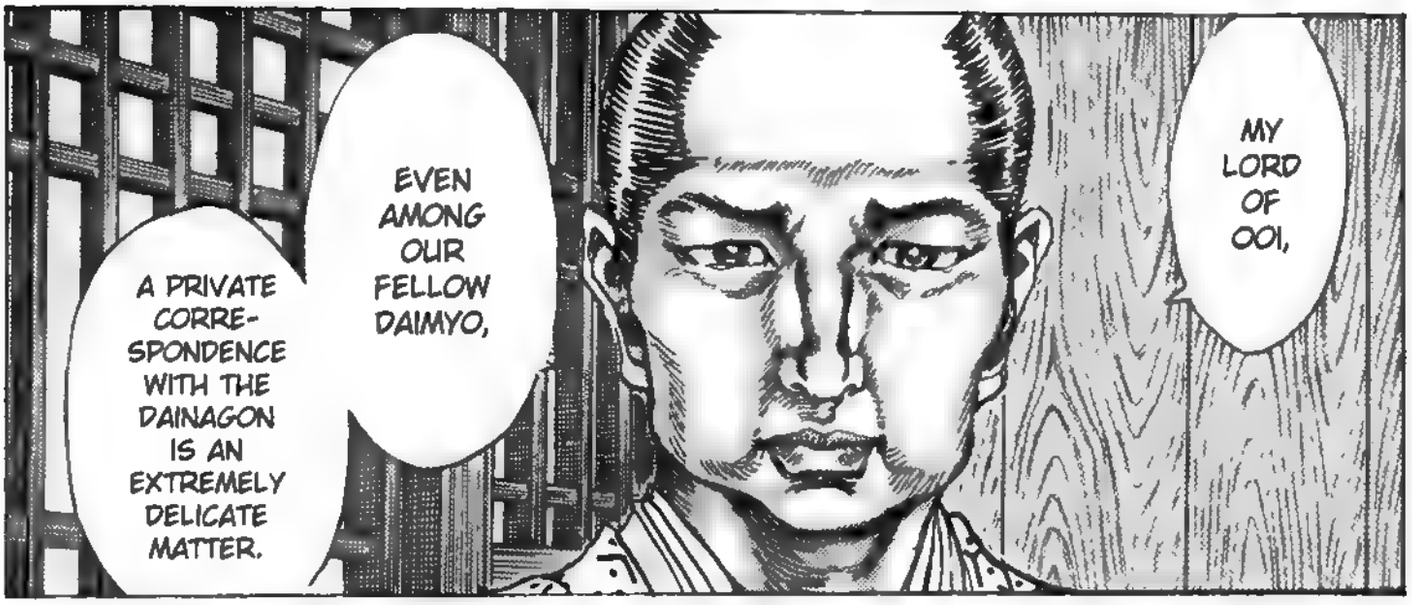
A BIT OF VIOLENCE IS COMMON AMONG THE YOUNG.
THERE IS NO REASON FOR PANIC.

SFX HAHAHAHAHA
はっ
はっ
はっ
はっ
TOSHI-KATSU RESEM-BLED IEMITSU'S GRAND-FATHER, IEYASU
HIS CORPU-LENT BODY SHAKING WITH LAUGH-TER,

MY LORD OF OOI,

THERE WAS A RUMOR THAT HE WAS IEYASU'S ILLEGI-TIMATE SON
BECAUSE TOSHI-KATSU'S MOTHER HAD SERVED IEYASU,

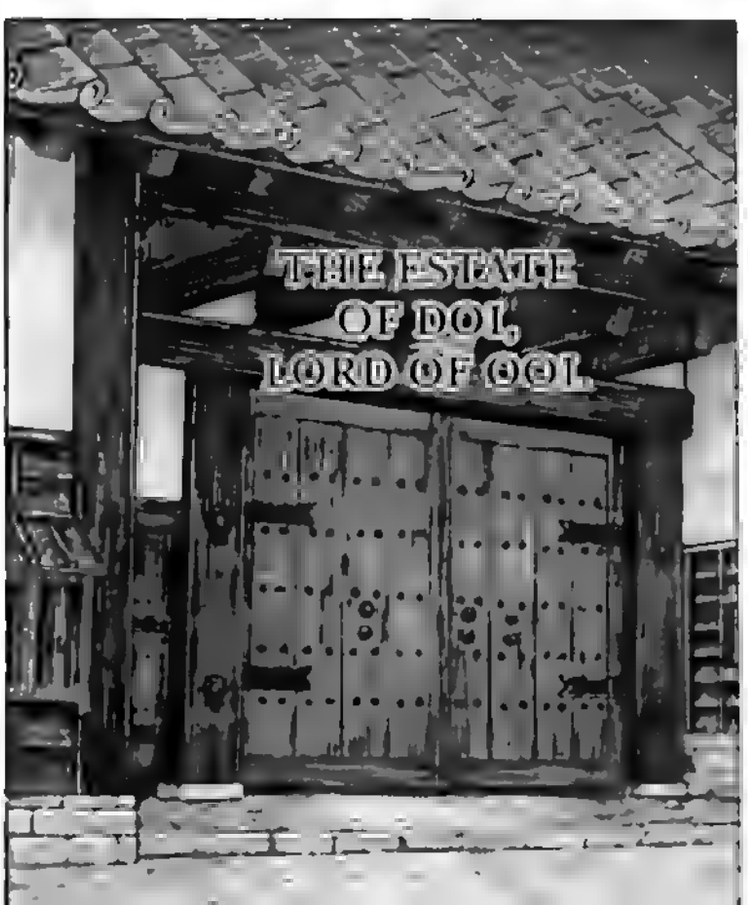

I HEAR TELL THAT YOU HAVE BEEN SECRETLY EXCHANGING LETTERS WITH THE DAINAGON.
IS THIS TRUE?

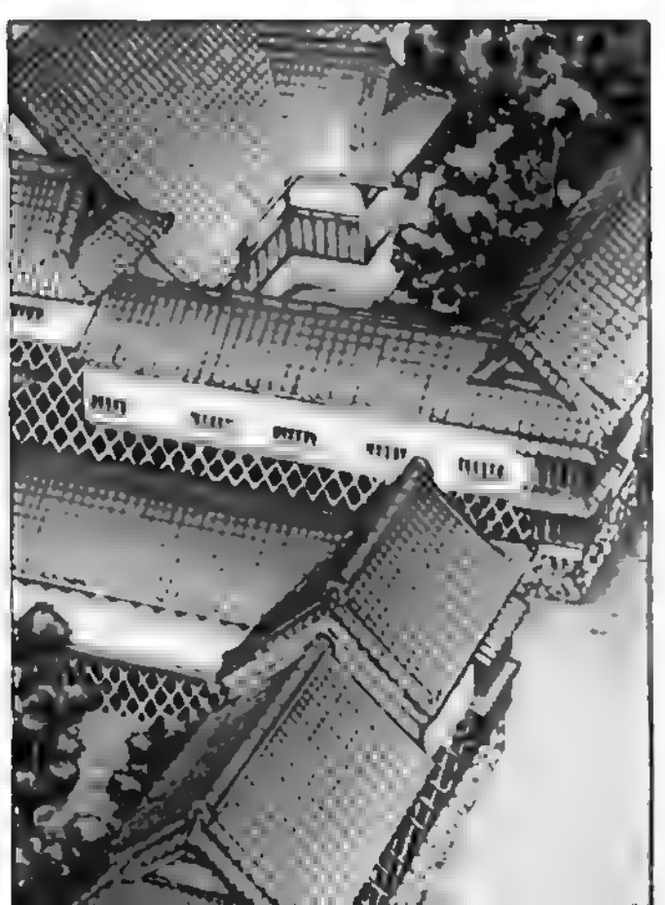

MY LORD OF OOI,
EVEN AMONG OUR FELLOW DAIMYO,
A PRIVATE CORRE-SPONDENCE WITH THE DAINAGON IS AN EXTREMELY DELICATE MATTER.

I SUPPOSE WE HAVE SPOILED PRINCE KUNICHIYO.

はっ
はっ
はっ
SFX: HAHAHAHAHA

WAS CONSPIRING WITH TOKUGAWA TADANAGA
TOSHI-KATSU, FEARED BY THREE HUNDRED LORDS


THE ESTATE OF DOI, LORD OF OOI



I HAVE COUNSELED INSURRECTION TO THE SURUGA DAINAGON.

I KNOW.

SEATED BEFORE TOSHI-KATSU,
WAS YAGYUU MUNE-NORI, LORD OF TAJIMA

A CLEVER, CAPABLE MAN, HE HAD RISEN TO THE POSITION OF POLITICAL ADVISOR,
HE HAD BECOME SHOGUN IEMITSU'S SWORD INSTRUC- TOR.
IN HIS YOUTH,
WITH THE THRUST OF A SINGLE BLADE.
BECAUSE HE RECOM- MENDED MANY OF HIS DISCIPLES AS INSTRUCTORS TO DAIMYO IN EVERY PROVINCE.
GIVING HIM A STEADY SOURCE OF INSIDE INFOR- MATION ABOUT THE CIRCUM- STANCES OF EACH CLAN

IF IT WERE TO BE KNOWN THAT DOI-SAMA, TO WHOM THE TOKUGAWA CLAN OWES A HEAVY OBLIGATION, IS AN ALLY OF THE DAINAGON,
THOSE WHO ARE SECRETLY PLOTTING TREASON AGAINST THE SHOGUN WOULD HASTEN TO JOIN SURUGA.

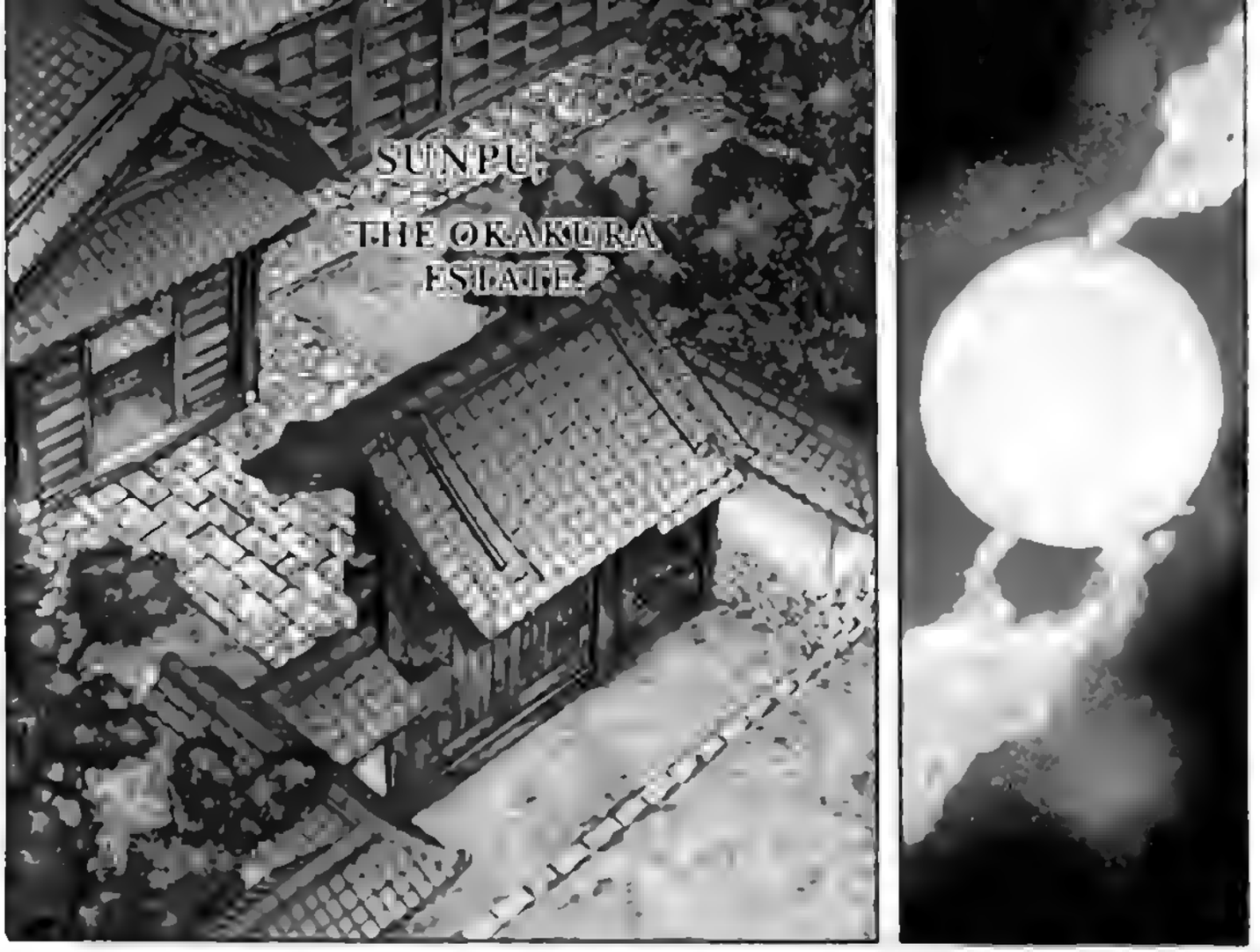
WE HAVE BEEN TOO PERMISSIVE WITH PRINCE KUNICHIYO.

TOSHIKATSU WAS DOING HIS UTMOST TO LEAD THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE.

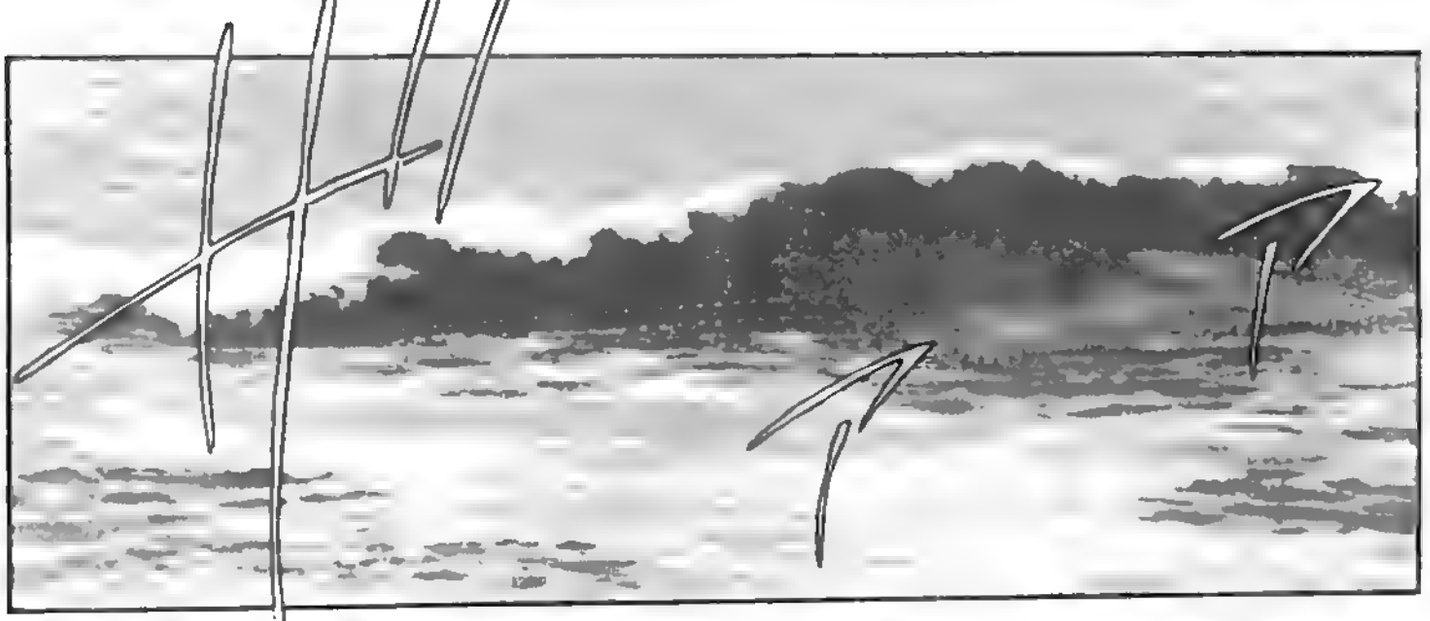
SHOGUN IEMITSU'S YOUNGER BROTHER, TOKUGAWA TADANAGA, HAD BECOME TOO GREAT A PROBLEM.
HE HAD BECOME A CAUSE OF GREAT DISORDER IN THE REALM.
TOSHIKATSU WAS USING TADANAGA,
AS A MEANS TO EXTER-MINATE THIS SOURCE OF UNREST IN ONE BLOW.

TOMORROW THERE WILL BE A TOURNAMENT HELD AT SUNPU.

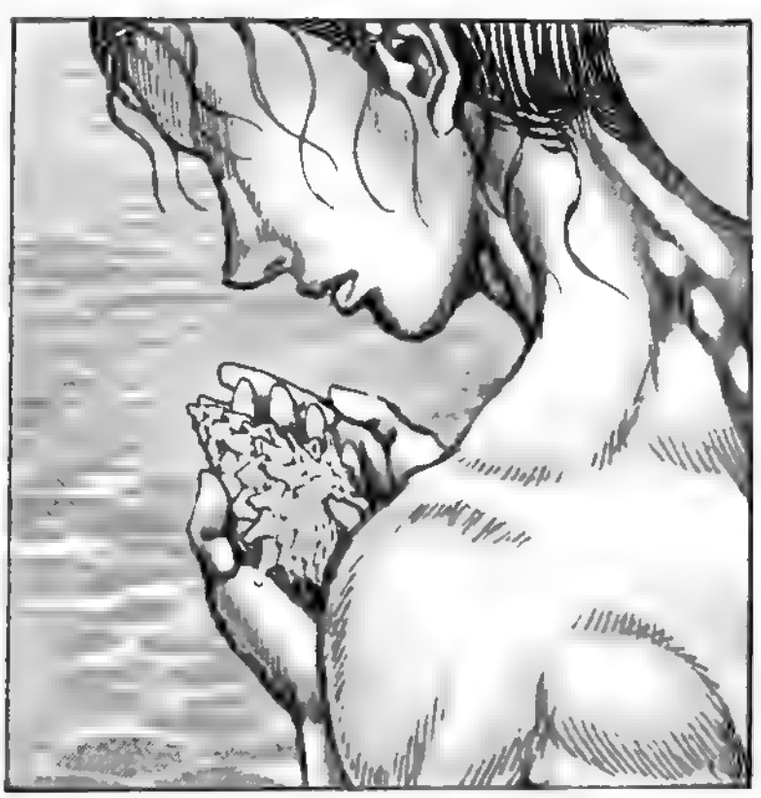
*Cherry blossoms of death


SUNPU
THE OKAKURA
ESTATE

FUJIKI WAS ABANDONED BY HIS PARENTS AS A CHILD?
IS THAT SO?



IRAKO-
SAMA,



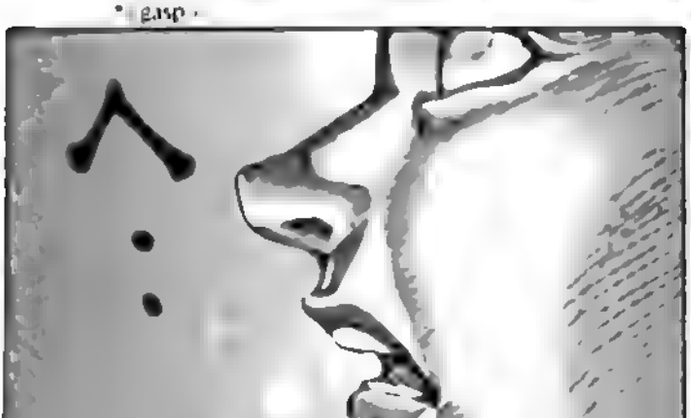
A PERSON FROM THE TOUDOUZA,
INSISTS ON SPEAKING WITH YOU...

AH...

Uh—
Umm—

IS THAT TSUTA-NOICHI?

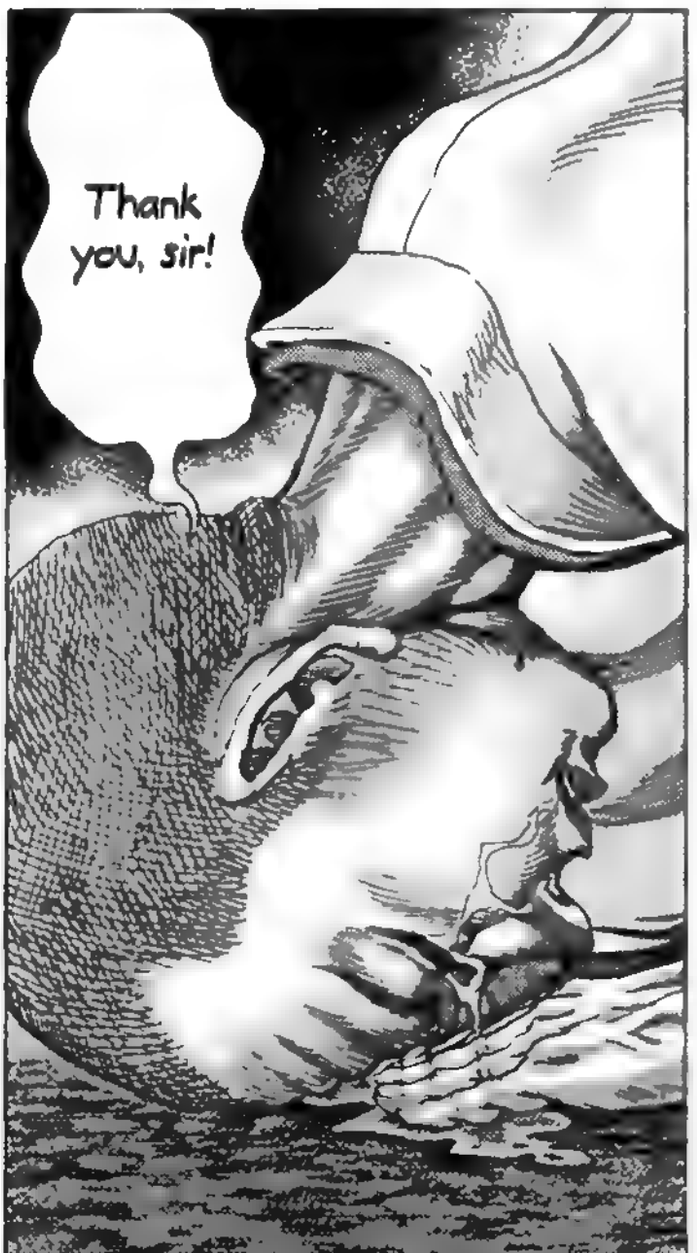
I-I_
I beg your pardon for troubling you at night


gasp

Thank you, sir!
You remembered me...
A poor wretch like me...
Sir...
WHY ARE YOU HERE?
There is something I must tell you.
I must...

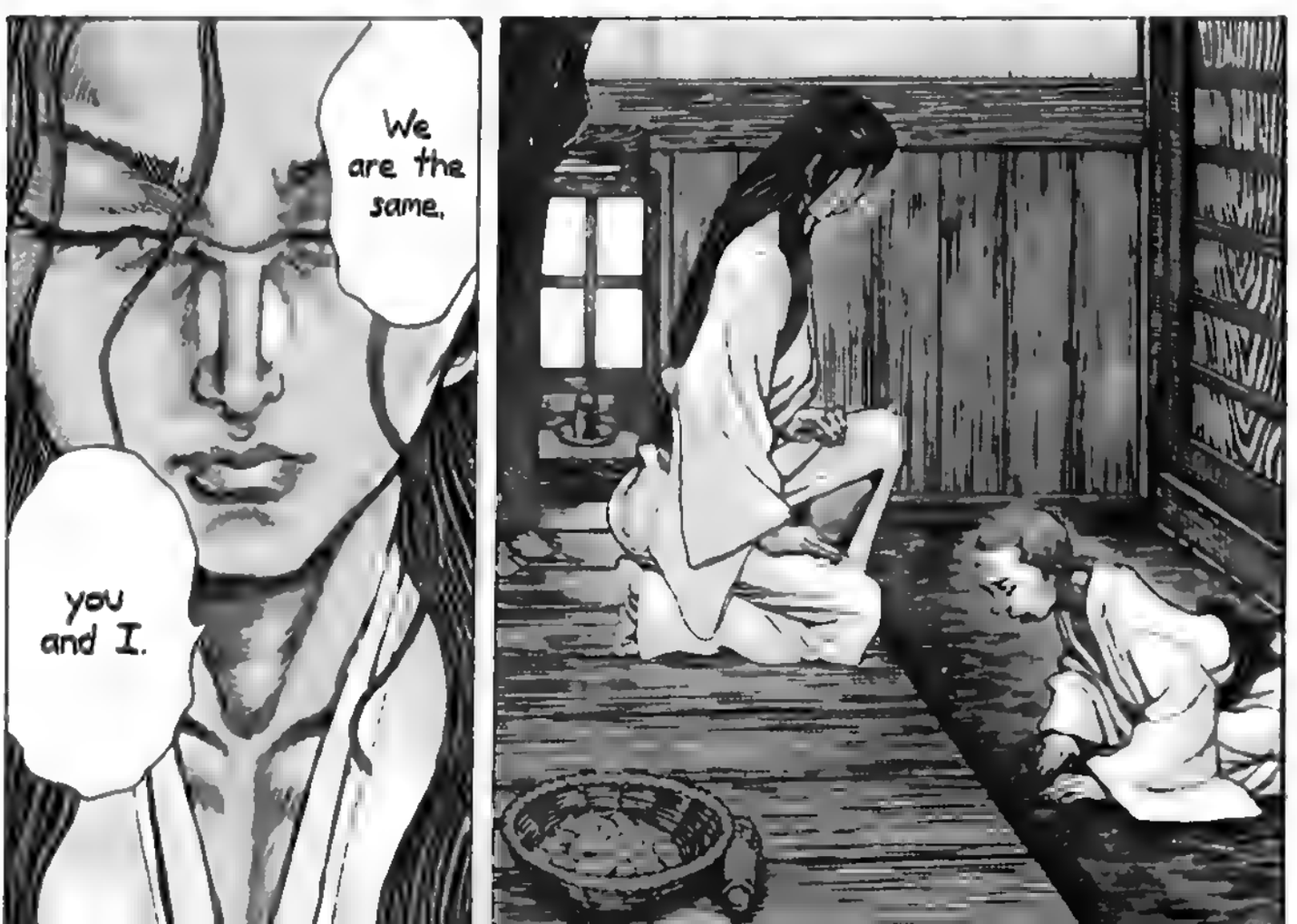
Irako-sama.
You are a lantern
You are the first to bring light to our hearts.
where even the sun refuses to shine

Uuuu...


Thank you, sir!

RAISE YOUR HEAD.

I said raise it!
*Ooof.

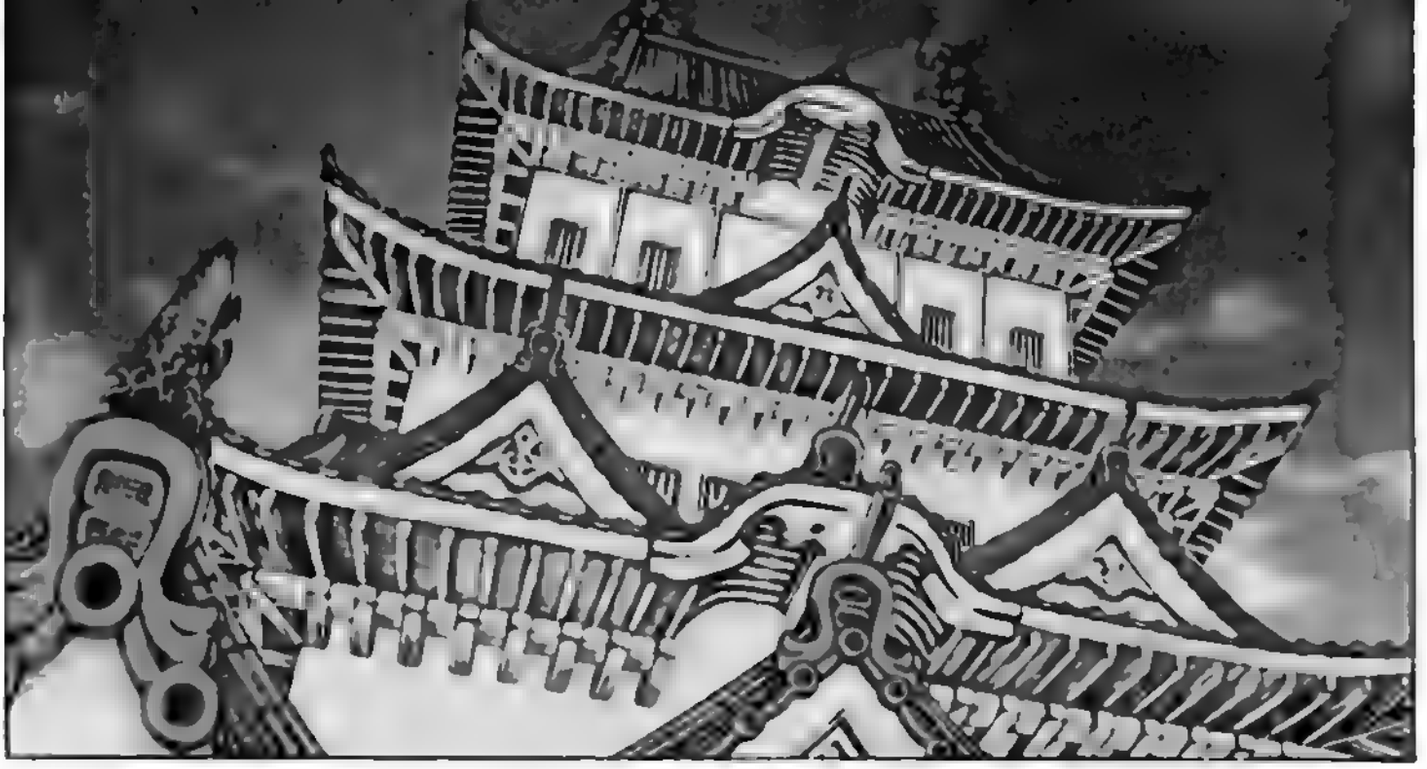

We are the same.
you and I.

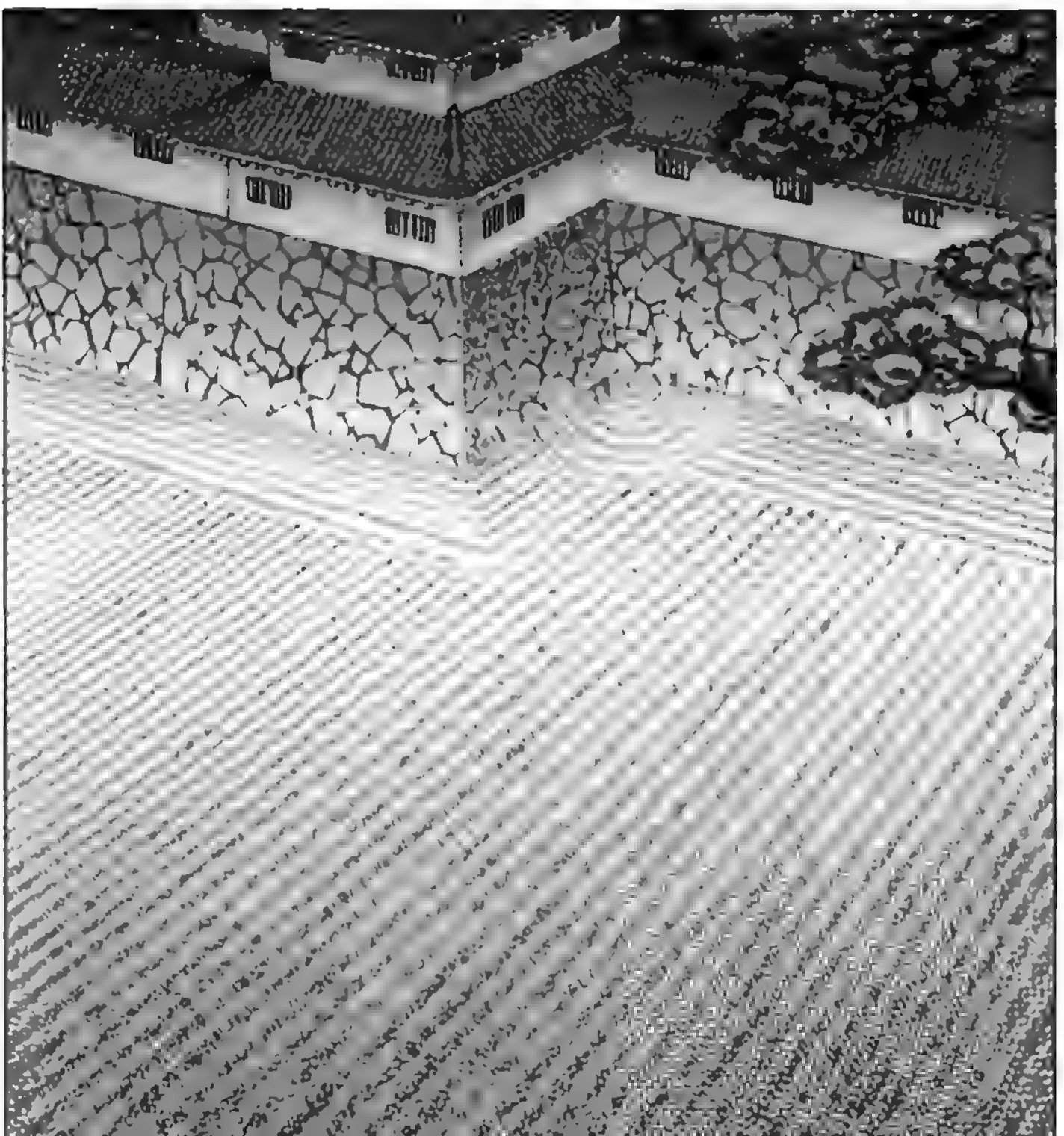
WHETHER SAMURAI OR NIGHT-HAWK,
THE SURUGA DAINAGON OR MEMBER OF THE TOUDOU-ZA,
IT MAKES NO DIFFER-ENCE.

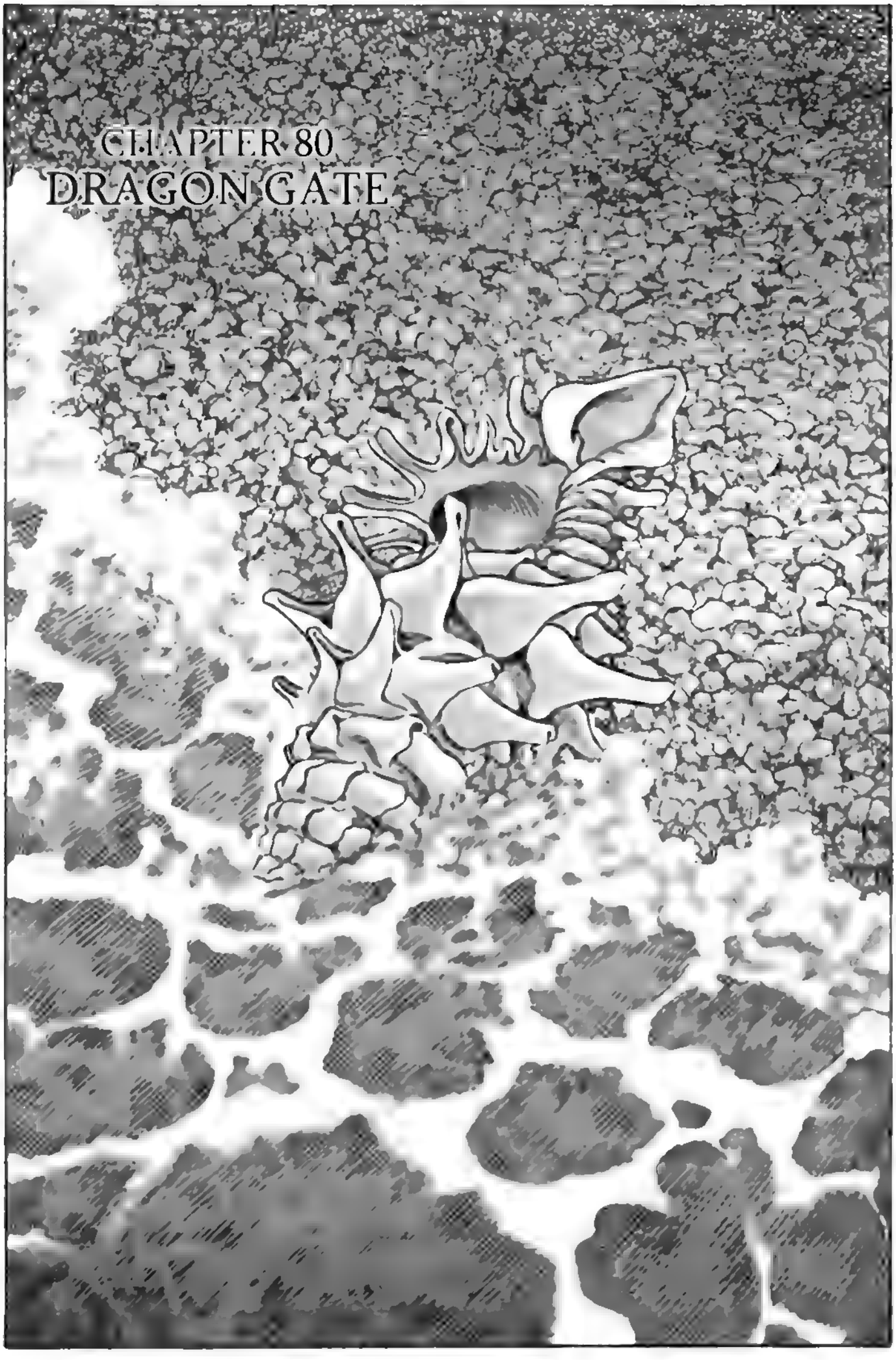
MY SWORD IS THE PROOF ...

THESE WORDS, WRUNG FROM THE VERY DEPTHS OF HIS SOUL,
SURPRISED EVEN SEIGEN HIMSELF.

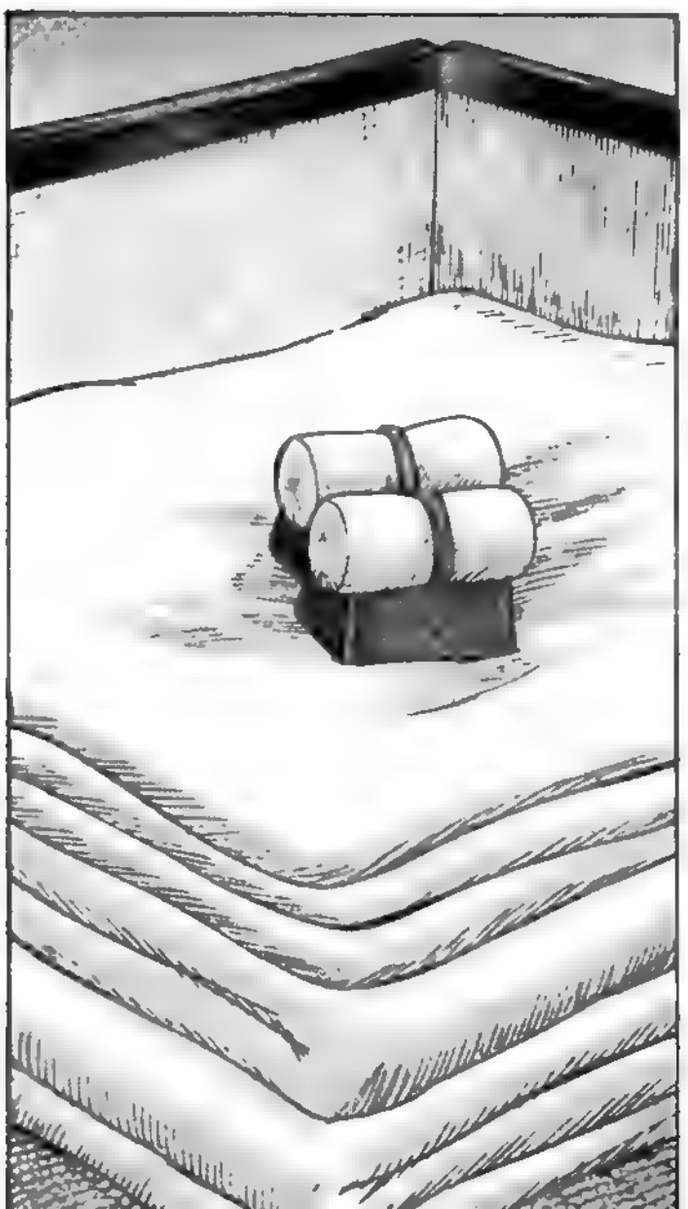
HE HAD NOT RISEN IN THE WORLD MERELY IN ORDER TO SATISFY HIS AMBITION,
BUT IN ORDER TO RE-PUDIATE,
HIER-ARCHICAL SOCIETY AND THE FIXED CLASS SYSTEM.

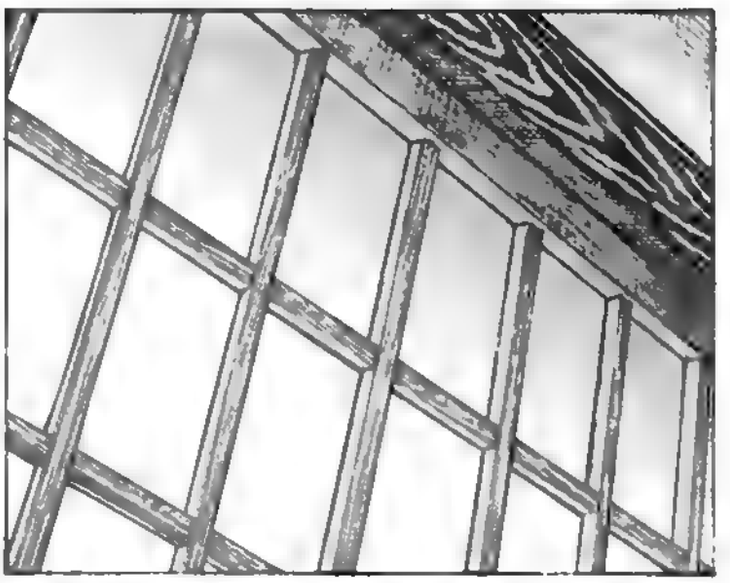


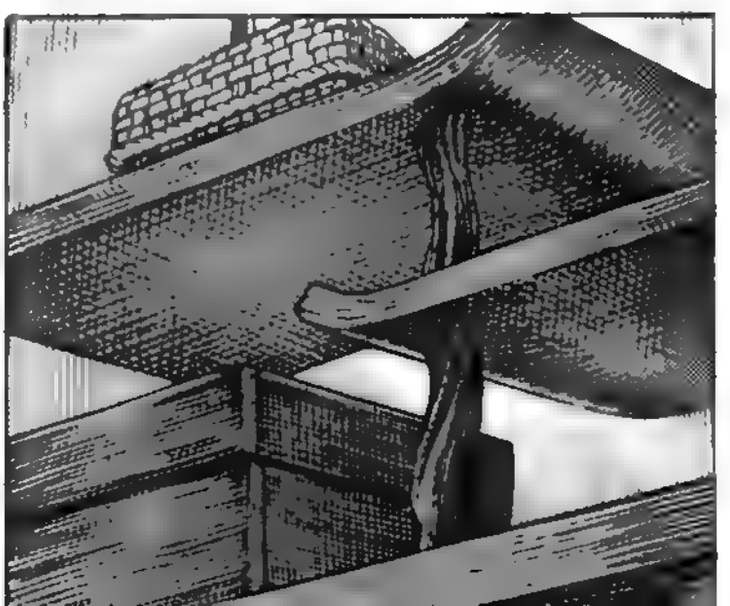



CHAPTER 80
DRAGON GATE

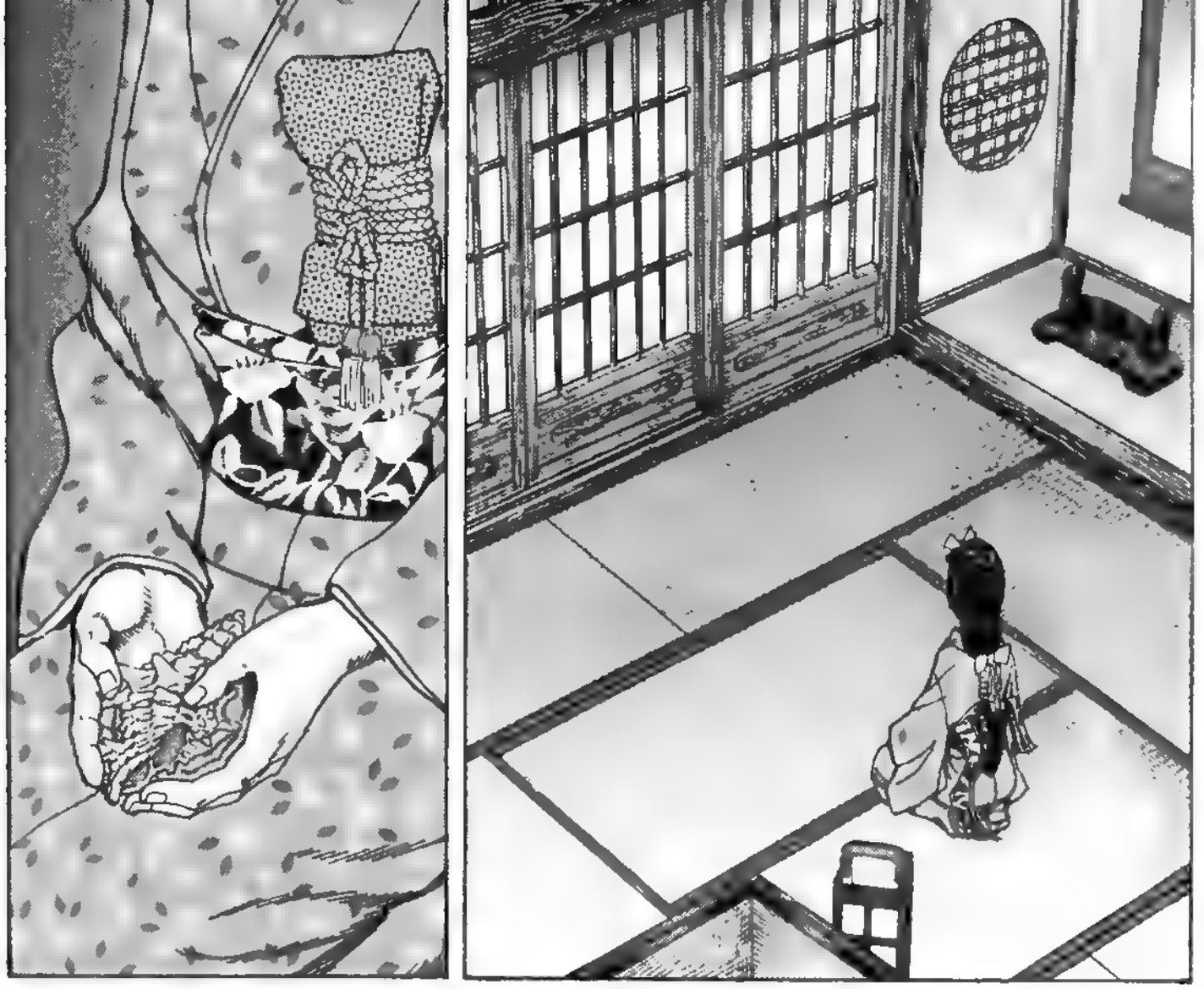
SEPTEMBER
24TH.

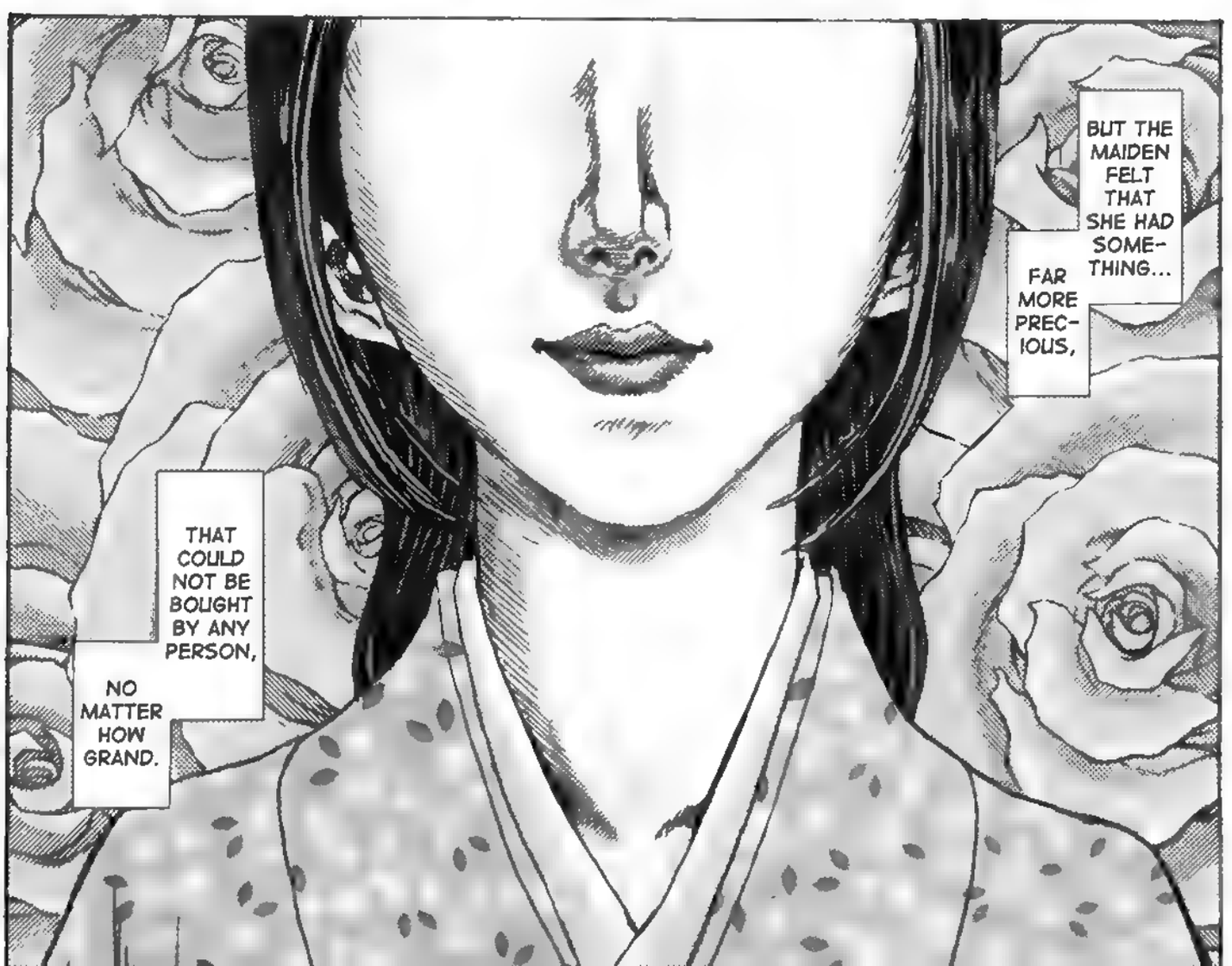






COM-
PARED
TO HER
FATHER'S
HOUSE
OF 300
KOKU,
THE
COTTAGE
ON THE
SASAHARA
ESTATE
WAS
SMALLER
THAN A
CLOSET.



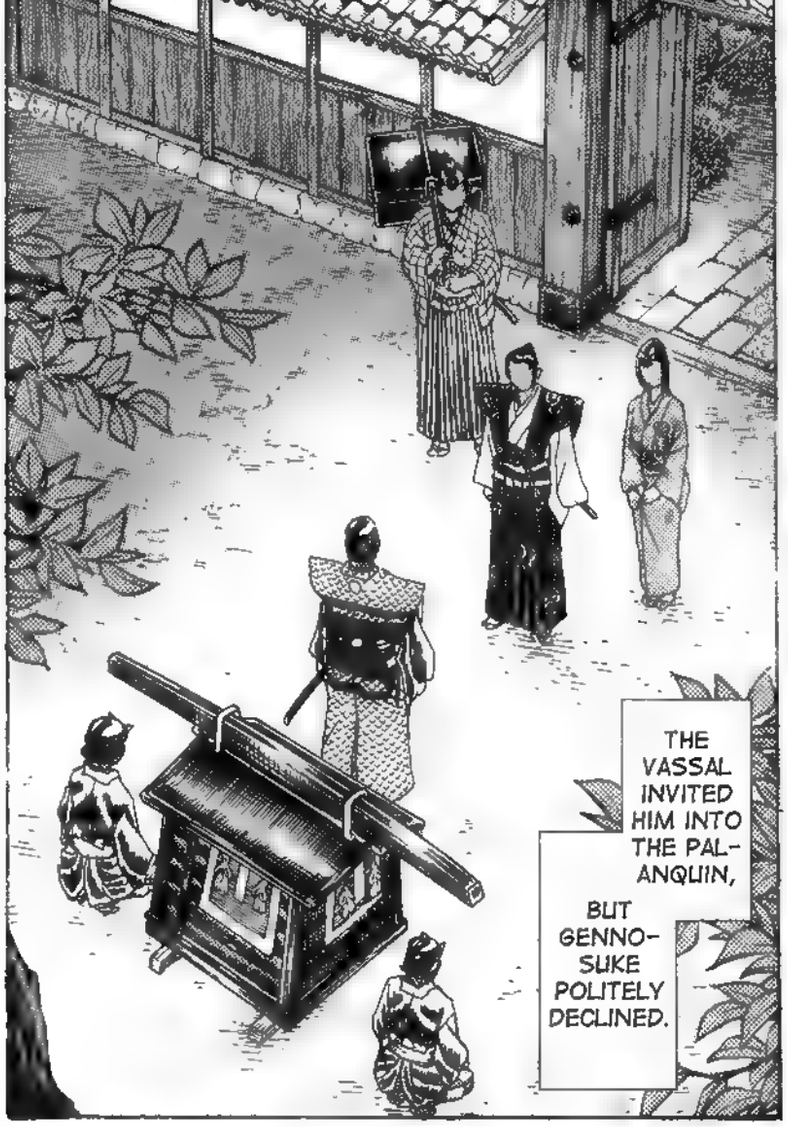

BUT THE MAIDEN FELT THAT SHE HAD SOME-THING...
FAR MORE PREC-IOUS,
THAT COULD NOT BE BOUGHT BY ANY PERSON,
NO MATTER HOW GRAND.

THE DISCIPLES OF OKAKURA SAY THAT IRAKO SEIGEN IS NOT A MAN BUT A DEMON,
AND THAT HIS BLADE HAS A FEARSOME SORCERY...

FUJIKI-SENSEI,
YOU'RE NOT AFRAID?

I WANT TO CUT HIM DOWN, SO I WILL DO SO.
THAT'S ALL.

FUJIKI GENNO-SUKE-DONO.
WE ARE HERE TO CONVEY YOU TO THE CASTLE.


THE VASSAL INVITED HIM INTO THE PAL-ANQUIN,
BUT GENNO-SUKE POLITELY DECLINED.

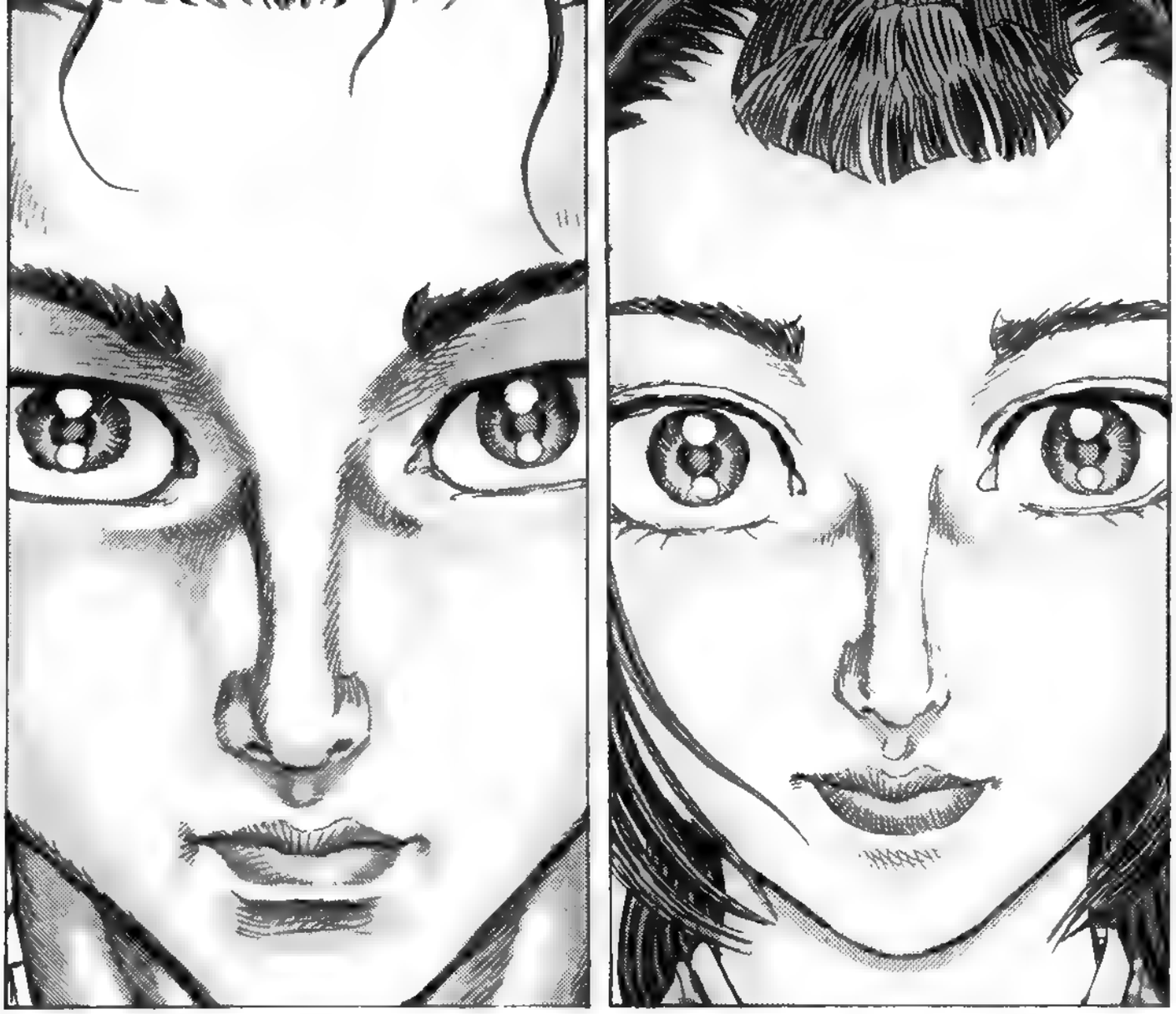
YOU HONOR ME. I AM MUCH OBLIGED.

I PREFER TO WALK TO THE CASTLE ON MY OWN FEET,
SO THAT I MAY ENJOY THE SCENT OF THE WIND AND THE TREES.

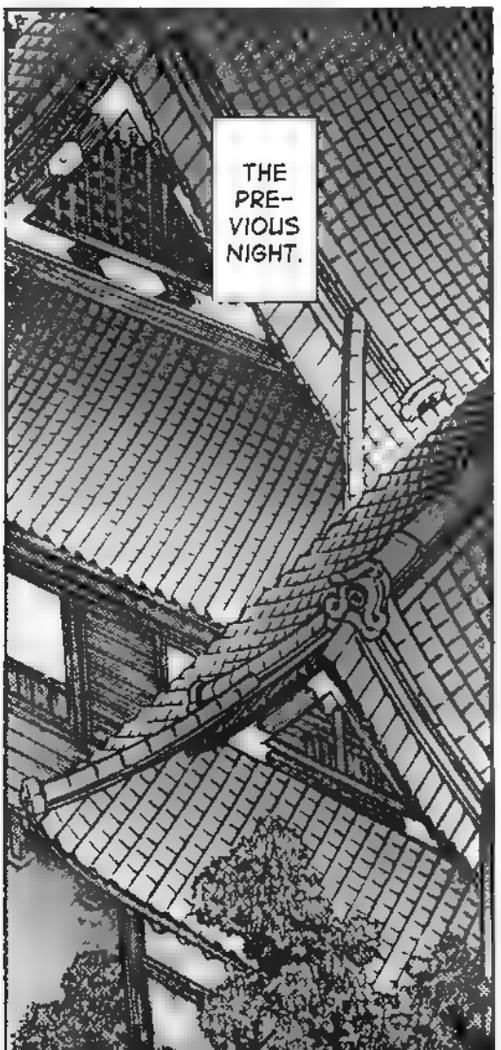
GENNOSUKE HAD EXPRESSED,
EXACTLY WHAT THE MAIDEN HERSELF HAD BEEN FEELING IN HER HEART.
THE SERVANTS SENT TO ACCOMPANY HIM ALLOWED HIM GO ON AHEAD, AS HE PREFERRED.
AS YOU WISH, SIR.
AHEAD OF HIM WAS THE IMPERIAL TOURN-AMENT, FROM WHICH THERE MIGHT BE NO RETURN.

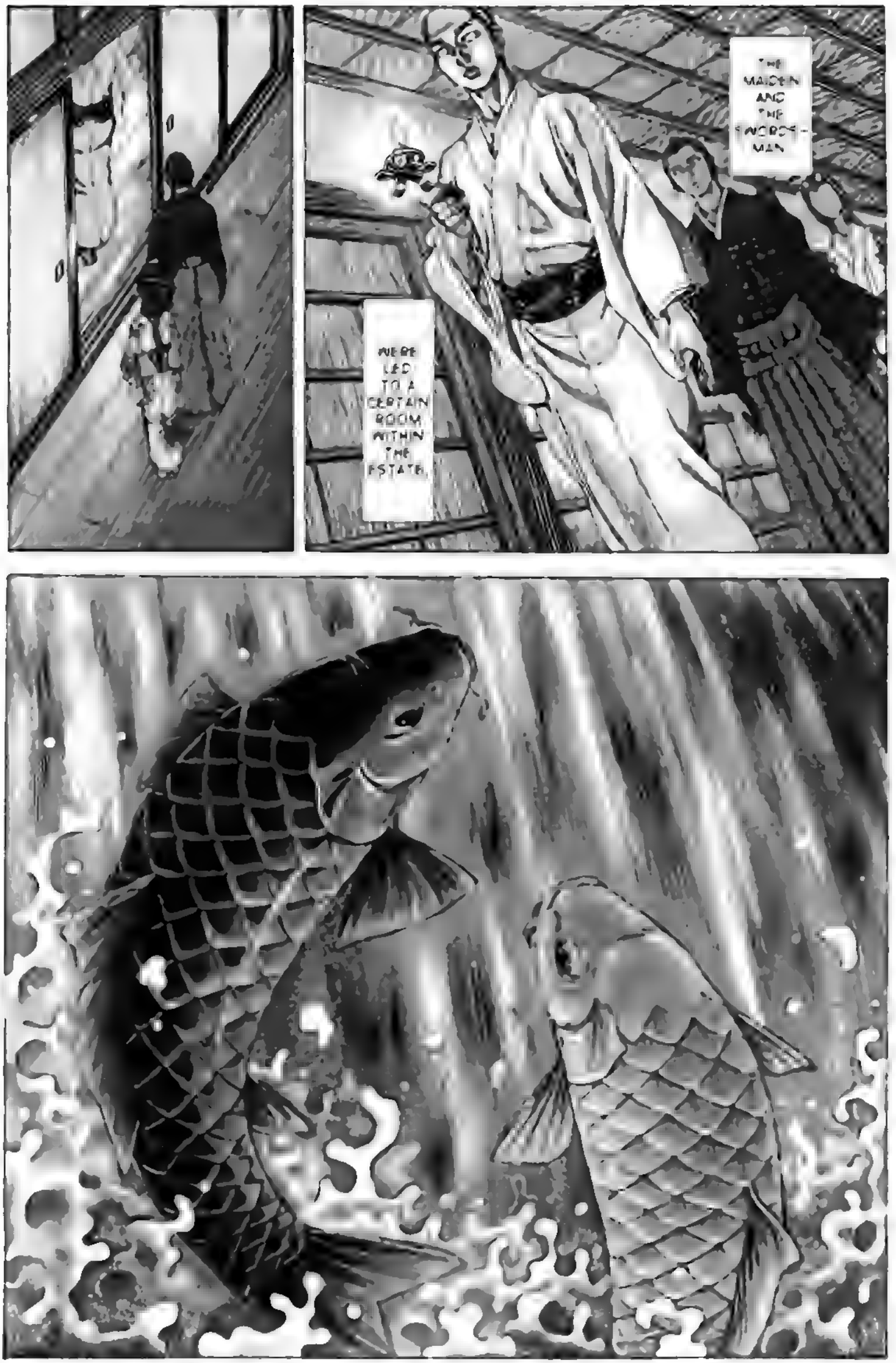
THE VASSAL TEJIMA SHINBEE SIGHED.
"WHAT A BEAUTIFUL COUPLE,"

THE BEAUTY OF THOSE WHO LIVE WITH INTENTION,
FAR EXCEEDS THOSE WHO MERELY EXIST.



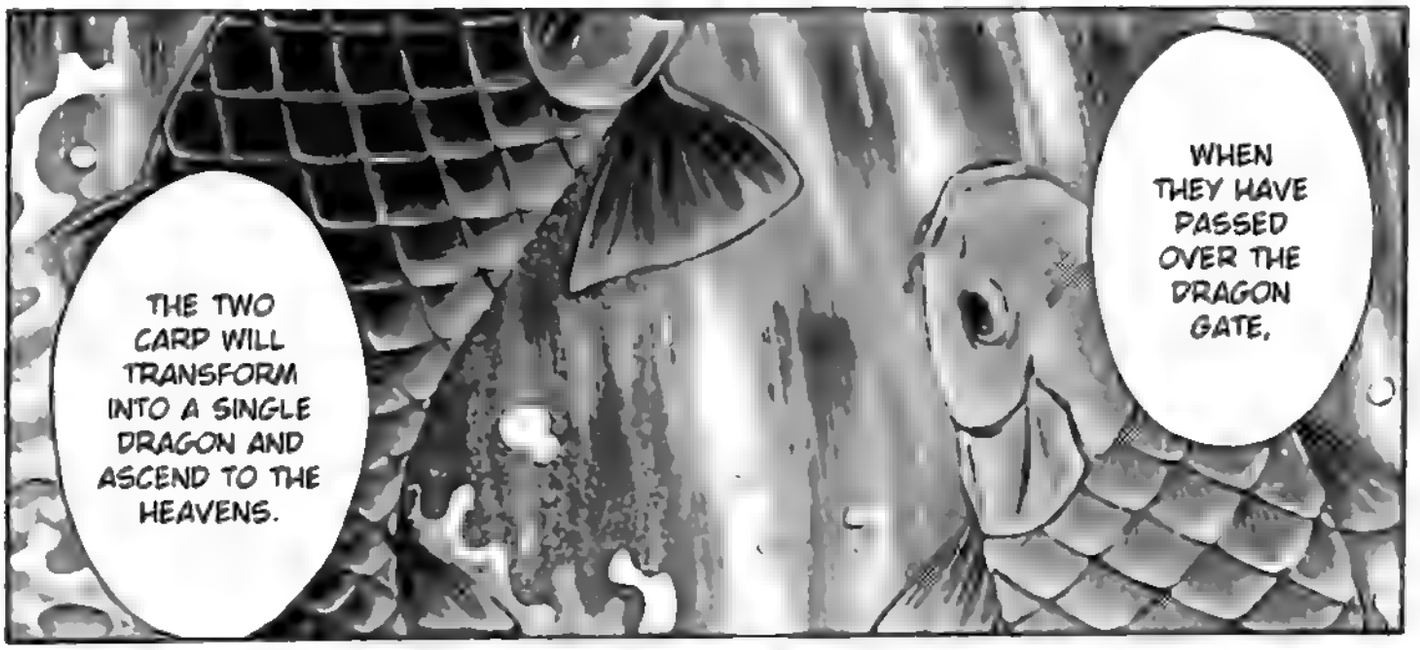
COME WITH ME.
SASAHARA SHUUZABUROU

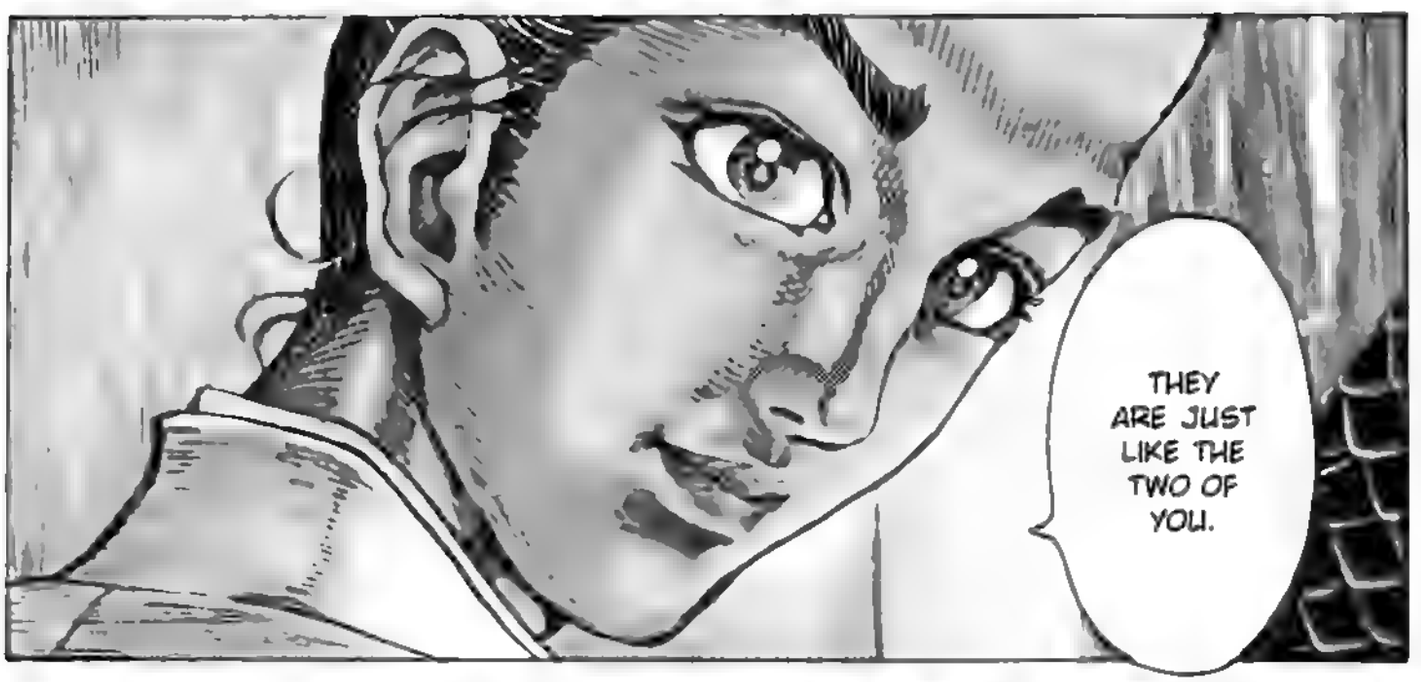

THE PRE-VIOUS NIGHT.


THE MAIDEN AND THE SWORDS-MAN
WERE LED TO A CERTAIN ROOM WITHIN THE ESTATE.

THEY DID NOT KNOW HOW IT HAD BEEN PAINTED.
IT WAS A HANGING SCROLL OF "SHINING CARP"

THIS MATED PAIR OF A BLACK CARP AND A RED CARP,
ARE SWIMMING UPSTREAM IN THE DISTANT YELLOW RIVER, TO CROSS THE RAPIDS CALLED THE "DRAGON GATE."
THROUGH THE RUSHING STREAM THAT PUMMELS THEM TO THEIR VERY BONES,
THE PAIR OF CARP SWIM WITH THEIR HEARTS AS ONE.


WHEN THEY HAVE PASSED OVER THE DRAGON GATE,
THE TWO CARP WILL TRANSFORM INTO A SINGLE DRAGON AND ASCEND TO THE HEAVENS.

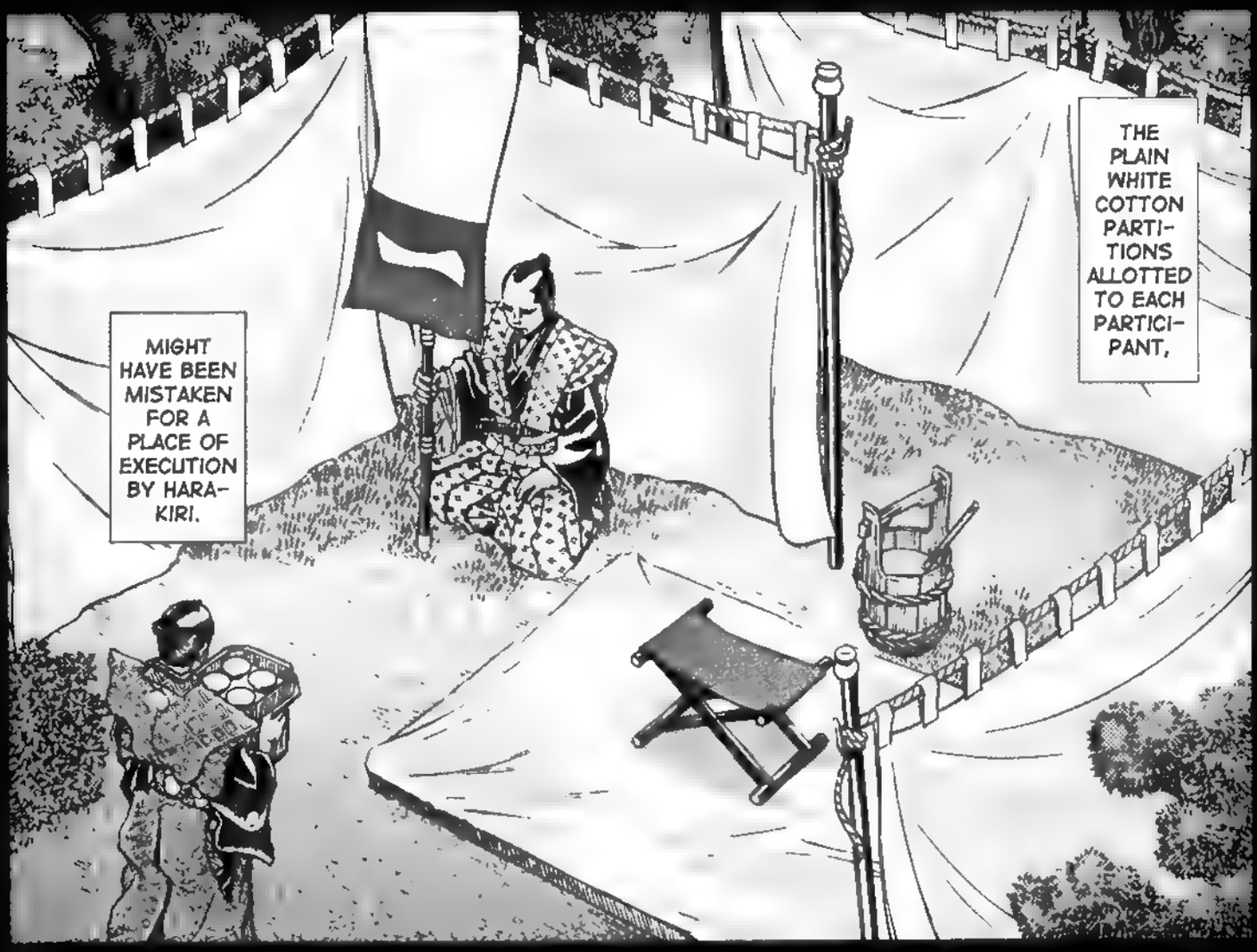

THEY ARE JUST LIKE THE TWO OF YOU.

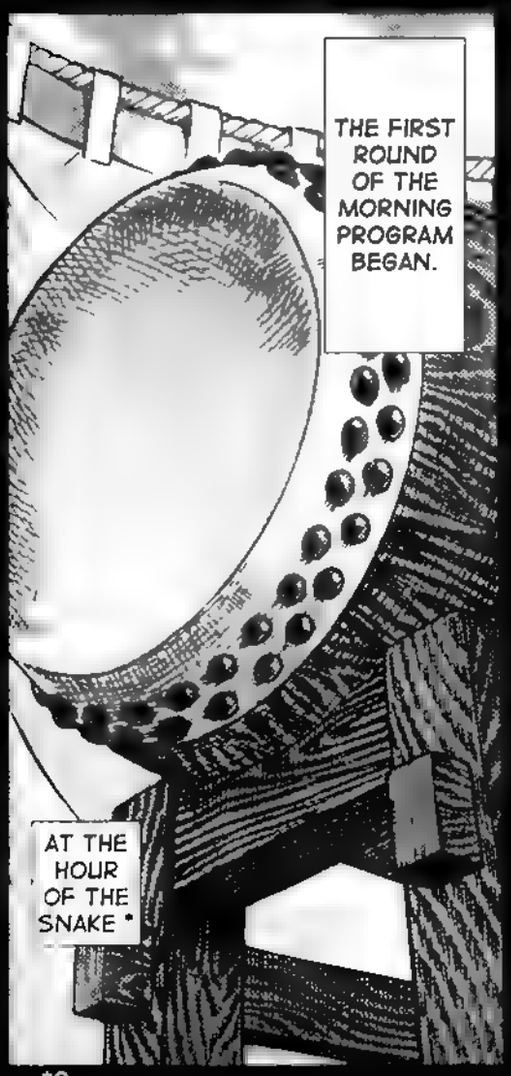
THE MAIDEN AND THE SWORDS-MAN BLUSHED

THESE TWO YOUNG PEOPLE
HAD EXCHANGED A SACRED VOW THAT ON THE NIGHT OF VICTORY AT THE IMPERIAL TOURNAMENT,
THEY WOULD JOIN TOGETHER AS ONE.

THE TWENTY-TWO PARTICIPATING SWORDSMEN WERE DIVIDED INTO ELEVEN ROUNDS

東
WITH THE FLAGS DISPLAYED, THE GARDEN WHERE THE PARTICIPANTS AWAITED THEIR TURNS,
LOOKED JUST LIKE A BATTLE-GROUND


THE PLAIN WHITE COTTON PARTI-TIONS ALLOTTED TO EACH PARTICI-PANT,
MIGHT HAVE BEEN MISTAKEN FOR A PLACE OF EXECUTION BY HARA-KIRI.

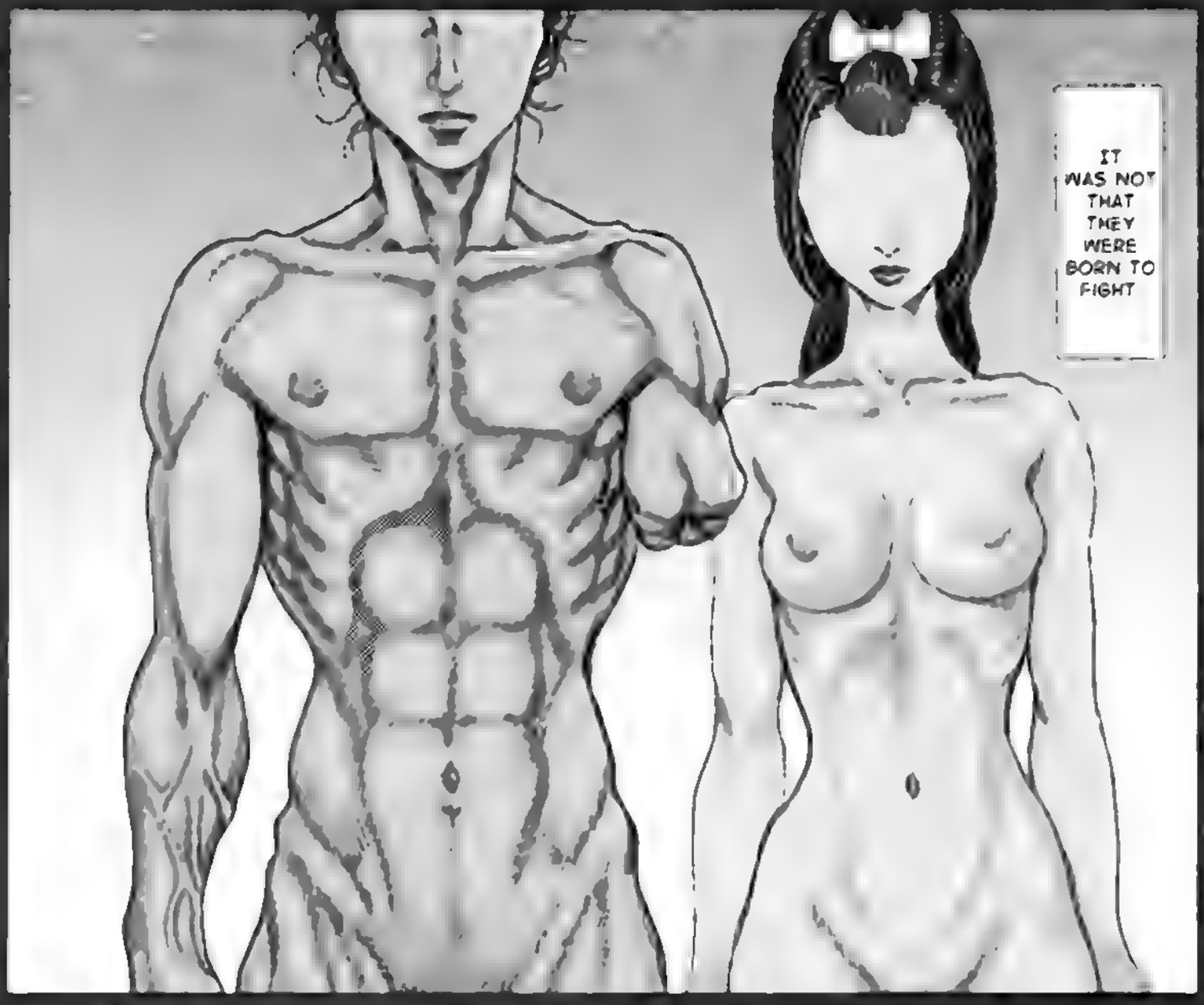

THE FIRST ROUND OF THE MORNING PROGRAM BEGAN.
AT THE HOUR OF THE SNAKE *

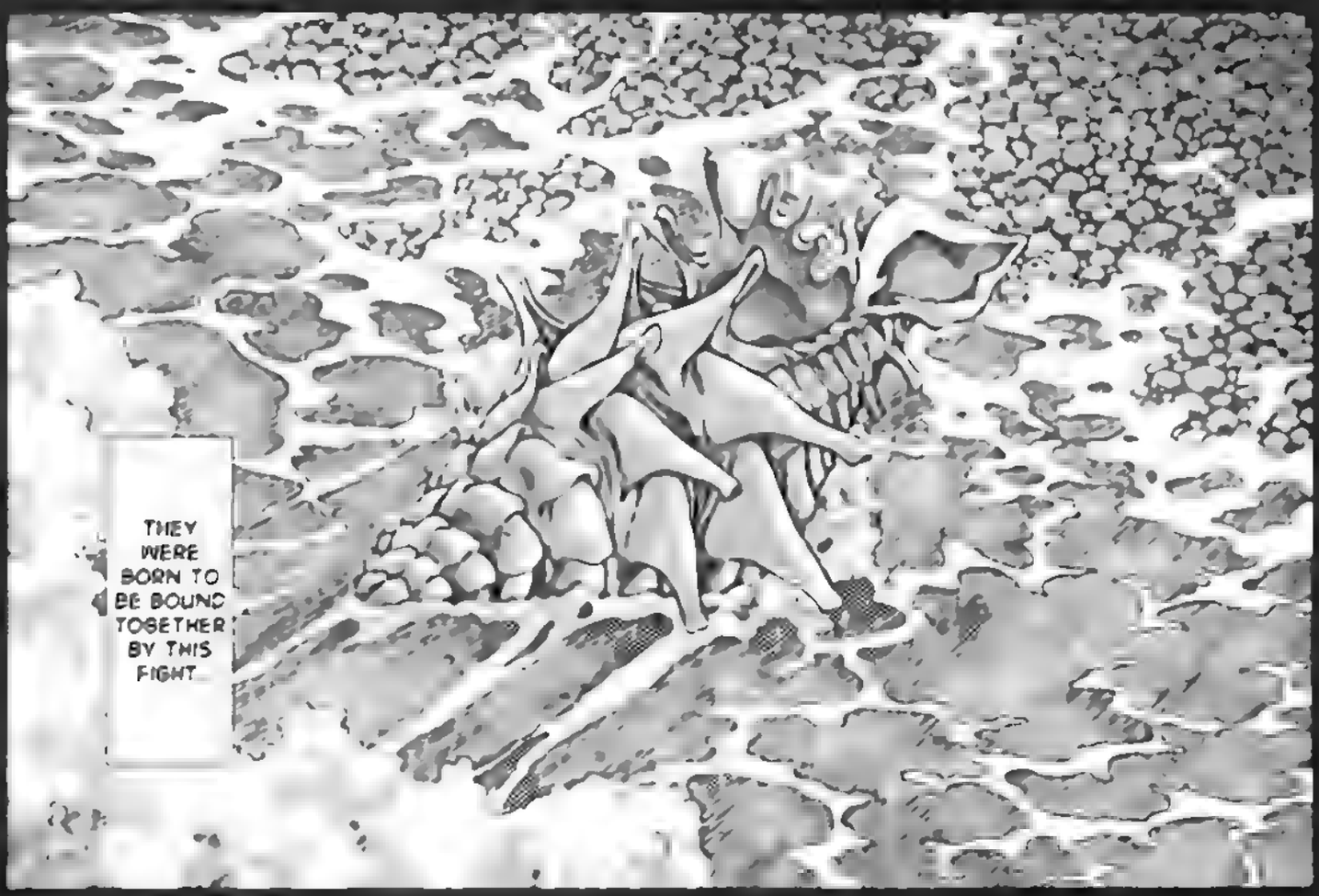
THE SWORDS-MEN WERE DIVIDED, INTO EAST AND WEST,
AND PLACED IN THE EASTERN AND WESTERN GARDENS,
SO THAT THEY MIGHT BE SPARED FACING THEIR OPPONENTS BEFORE THE MATCH.

*9 am

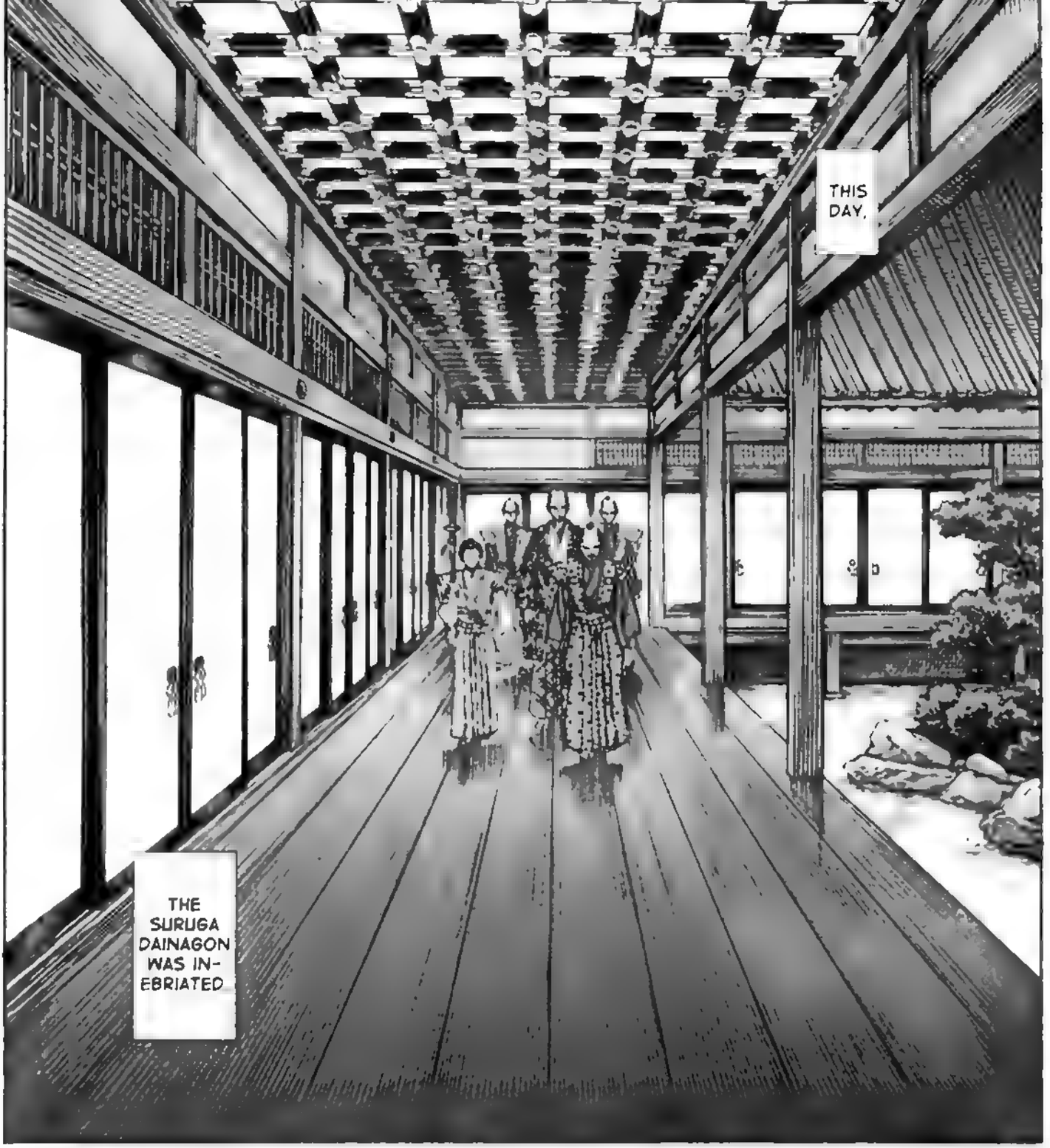
THE STEWARD OF THE SASAHARA ESTATE BORE A BUCKET OF WATER,
TO PREVENT THE INTRO-DUCTION OF FOREIGN SUBSTANCES BY ENEMIES.
SHINGO CARRIED A CHANGE OF CLOTHES.

WE'RE LIKE THE CARP BEFORE THE DRAGON GATE
THE YOUNG COUPLE
THE EASTERN GATE OF SUNPU CASTLE

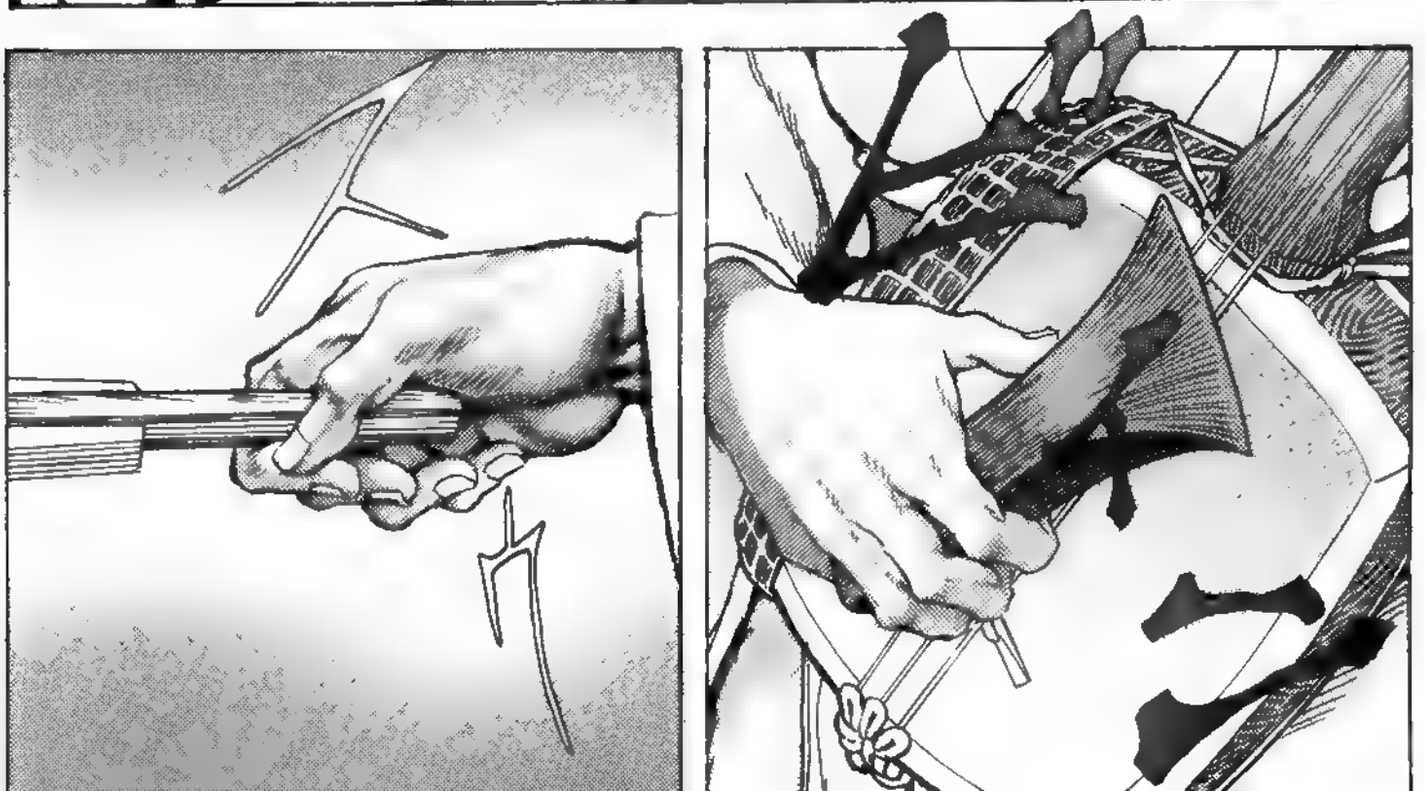

IT WAS NOT THAT THEY WERE BORN TO FIGHT


THEY WERE BORN TO BE BOUND TOGETHER BY THIS FIGHT...

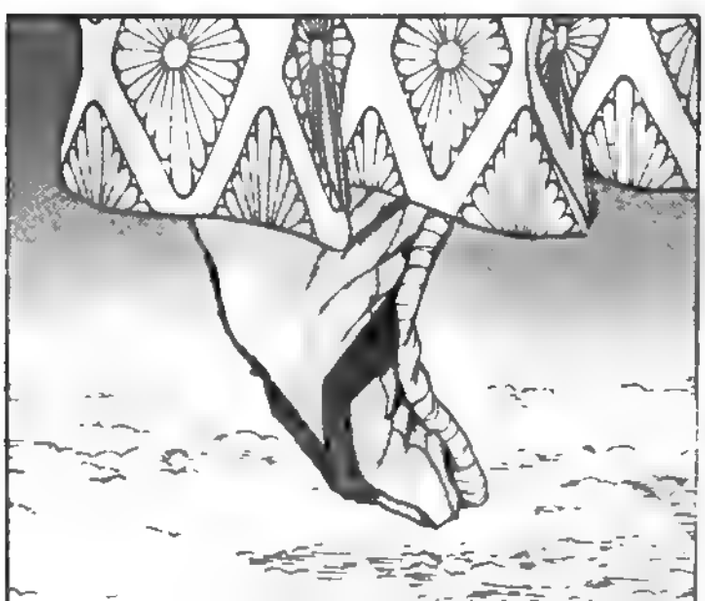
CHAPTER 81
BEFORE THE JAWS OF DEATH

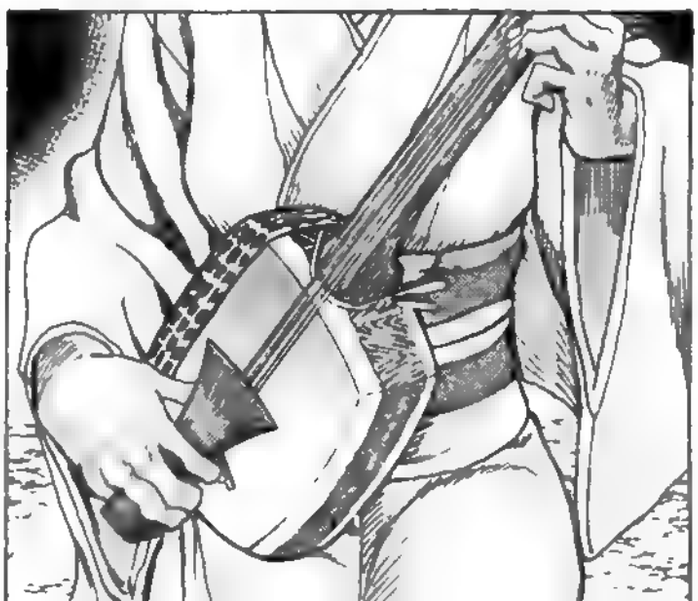

THIS DAY,
THE SURUGA DAINAGON WAS IN-EBRIATED

LIKE A CHILD, HIS JAW HUNG SLACK,
AND HIS GAZE WAS FIXED ON EMPTY SPACE. HIS APPEARANCE WAS ALTOGETHER EXTRAORDINARY.



If
in-one's
heart
He
follows
the
path
of
sincerity,

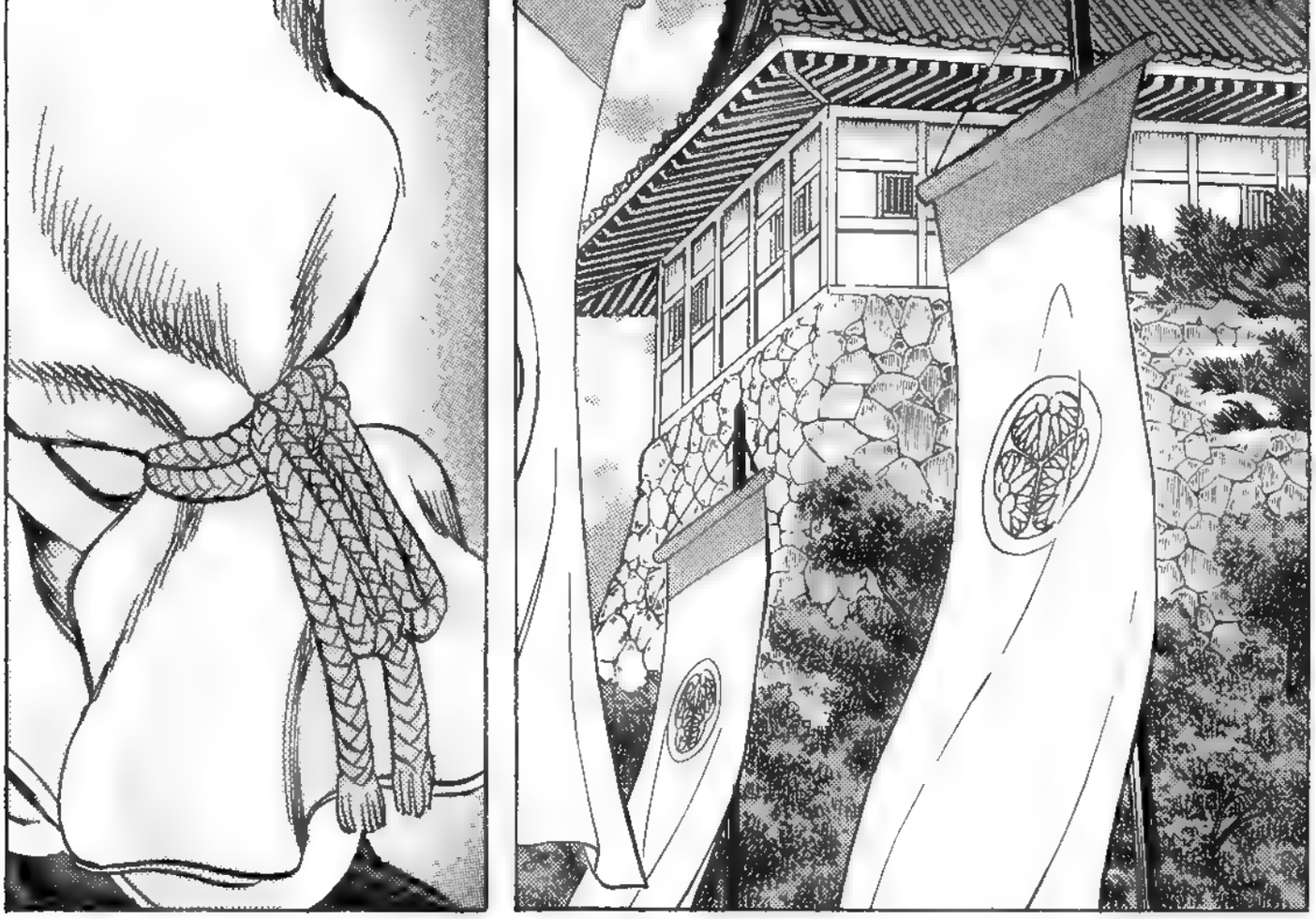


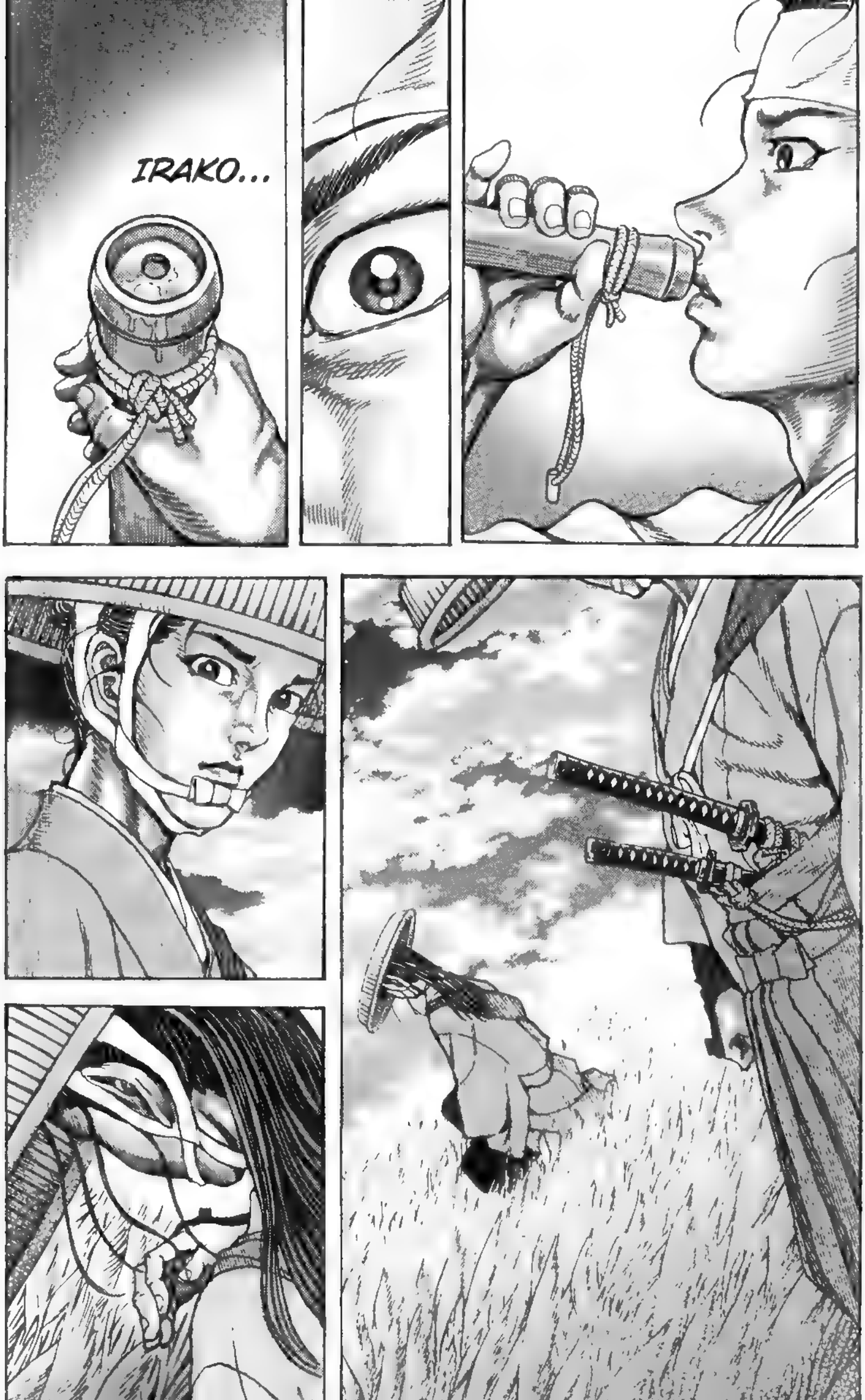


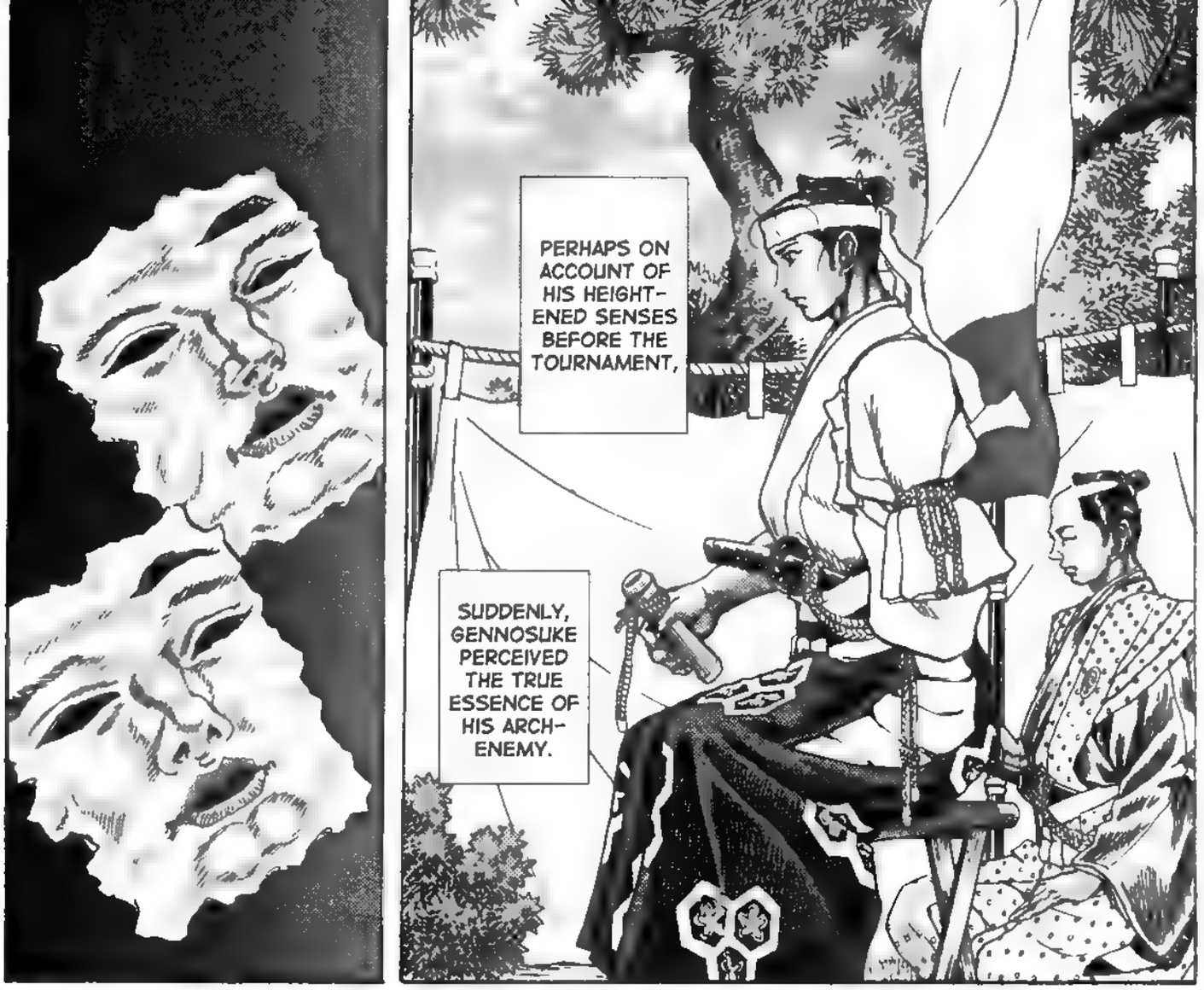
Though he does not pray,

Will not the gods protect him?

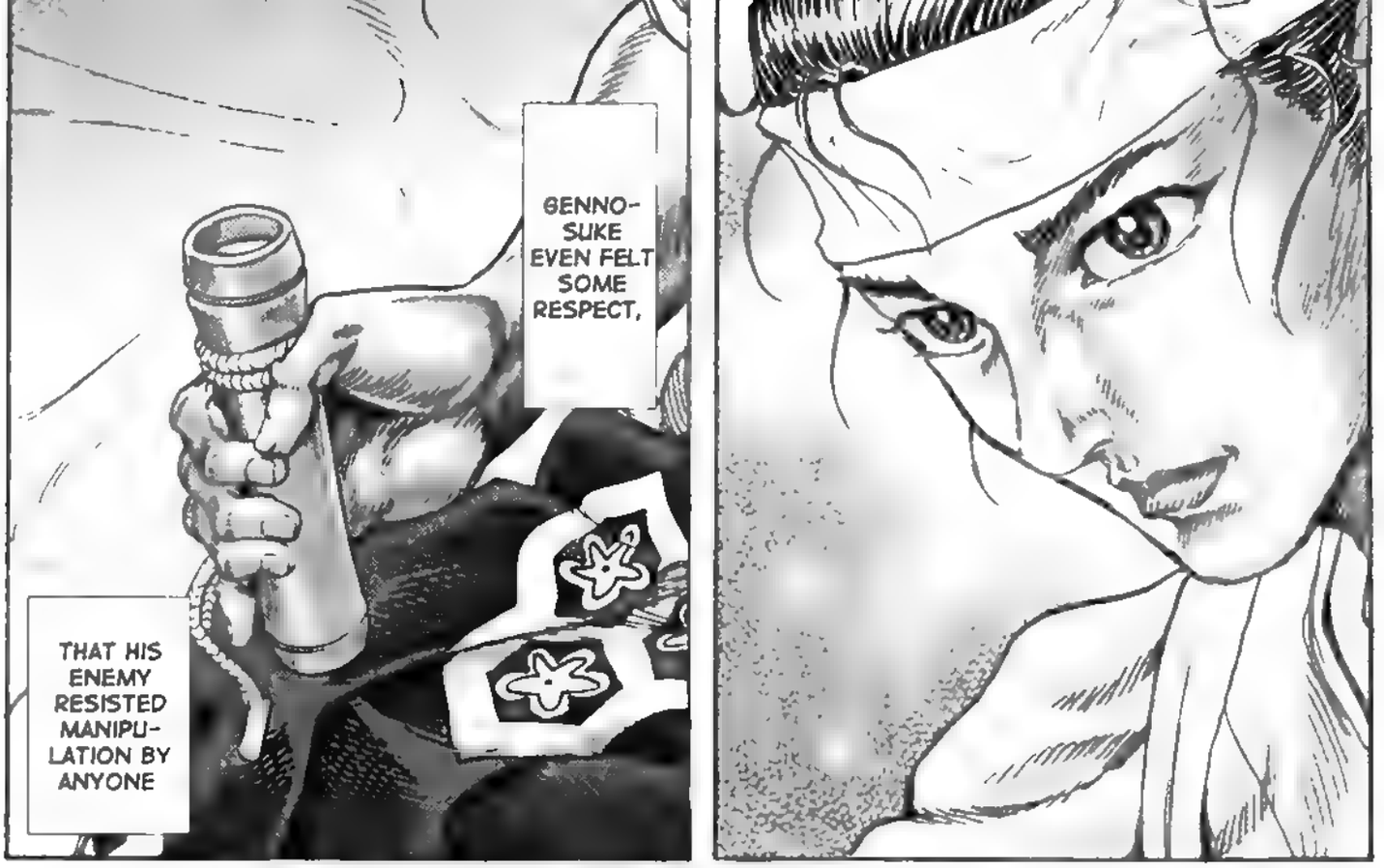
*Poem by Sugawara no Michizane, 9th century court official, scholar and poet, quoted in the Hagakure. Translation by William Scott Wilson.

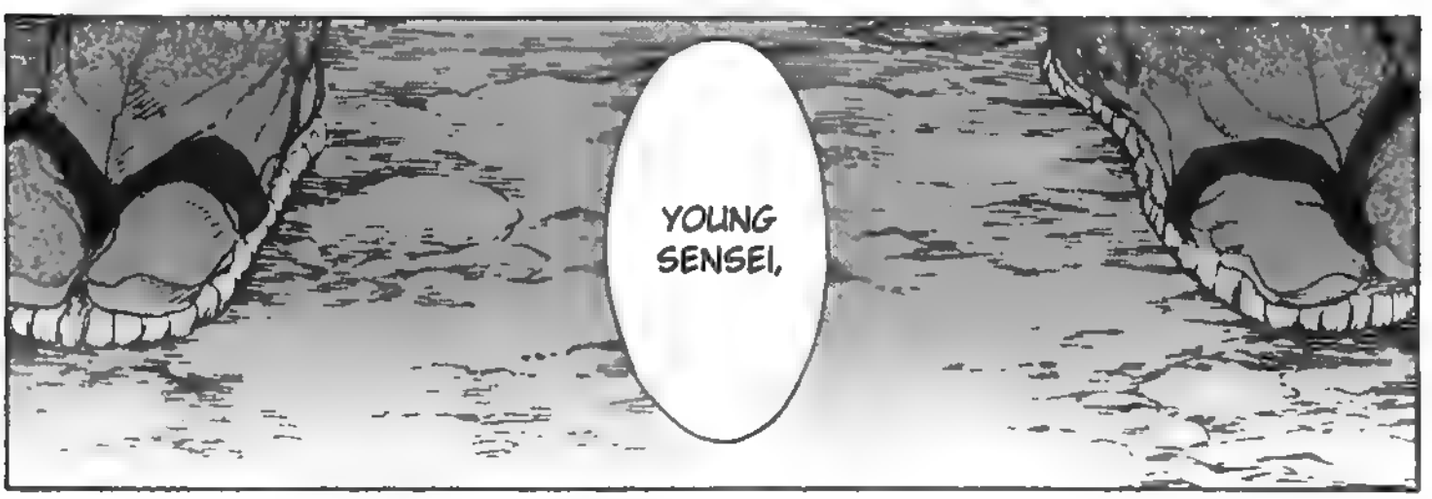


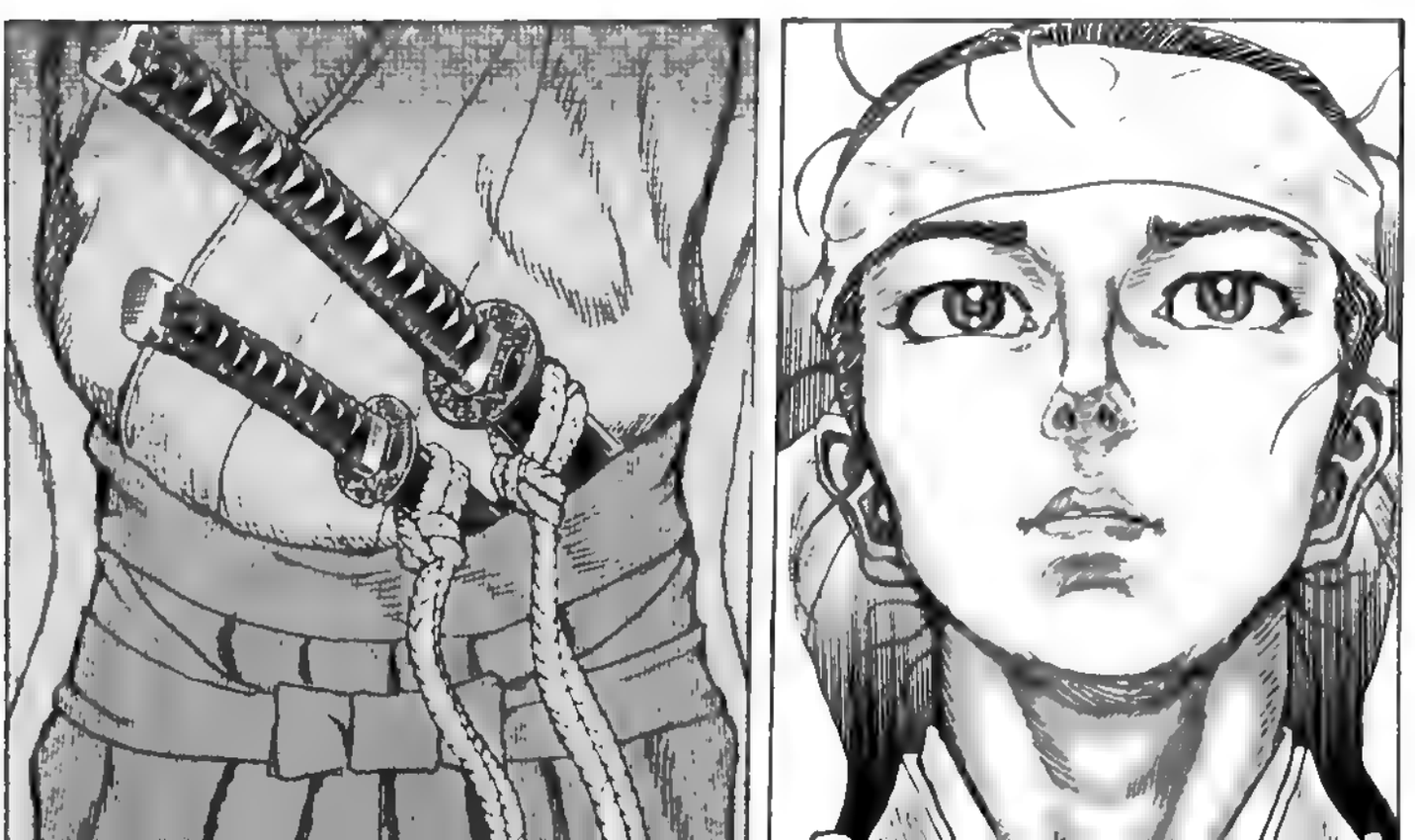

IRAKO...


PERHAPS ON ACCOUNT OF HIS HEIGHTENED SENSES BEFORE THE TOURNAMENT,
SUDDENLY, GENNOSUKE PERCEIVED THE TRUE ESSENCE OF HIS ARCH-ENEMY.

IRAKO SEIGEN,
WAS DISGUSTED AT BEING BY OTHERS ORDERED TO COMMIT MURDER.

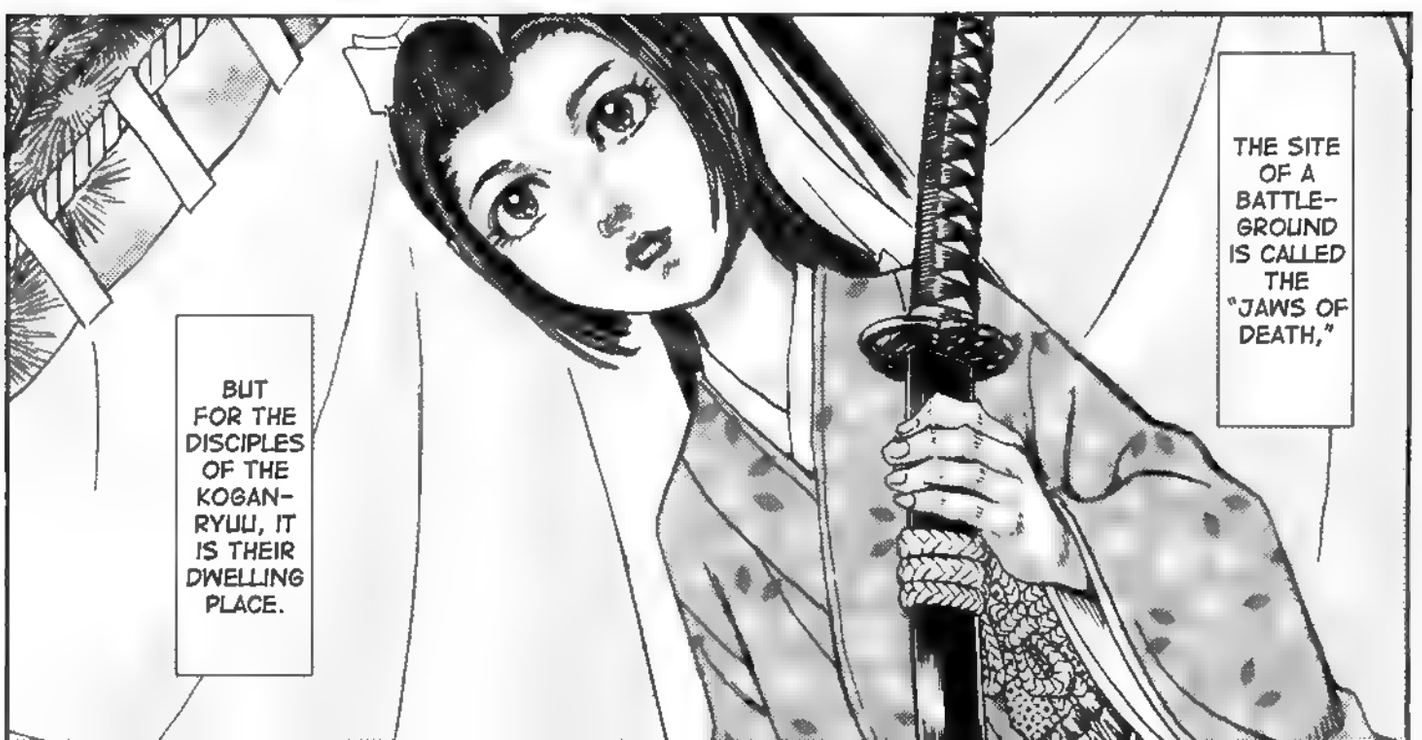

GENNO-SUKE EVEN FELT SOME RESPECT,
THAT HIS ENEMY RESISTED MANIPU-LATION BY ANYONE

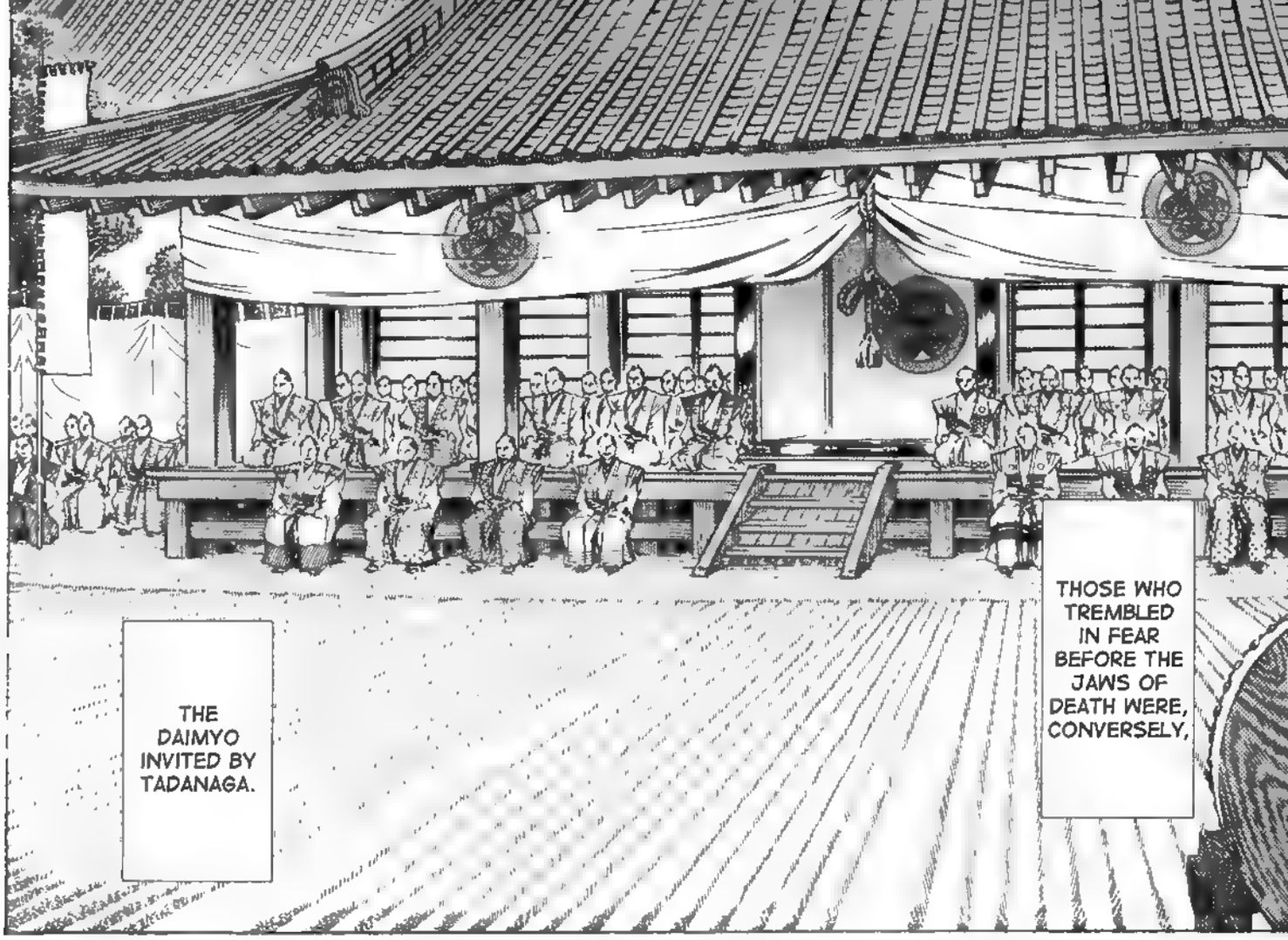

YOUNG SENSEI,



FIRST, YOU MUST FORCE SEIGEN TO RAISE HIS BLADE UPWARD.

I UNDERSTAND.


THE SITE OF A BATTLE-GROUND IS CALLED THE "JAWS OF DEATH,"
BUT FOR THE DISCIPLES OF THE KOGAN-RYUU, IT IS THEIR DWELLING PLACE.


THE DAIMYO INVITED BY TADANAGA.
THOSE WHO TREMBLED IN FEAR BEFORE THE JAWS OF DEATH WERE, CONVERSELY,

IS NOT THIS EXHIBITION AGAINST THE LAW?
THIS IS GOING TOO FAR, EVEN FOR THE SHOGUN'S BROTHER ...

THEN I WILL BLOODY MYSELF TO SATISFY YOUR SPIRIT OF REBELLION AGAINST THE SHOGUNATE.

IF THE GARDENS OF SUNPU ARE TO BE DESECRATED,

KATOU TADAHIRO, LORD OF HIGO,

ONE OF THE DAIMYO WHO ATTENDED THE TOURNA-MENT IN PERSON,

WOULD LATER HAVE HIS DOMAIN SEIZED.

IF TADANAGA WAS UNDER SUSPICION OF REBEL-LION,

THE SHOGUNATE'S INQUIRY WOULD INCLUDE THOSE WHO ATTENDED THIS EVENT.

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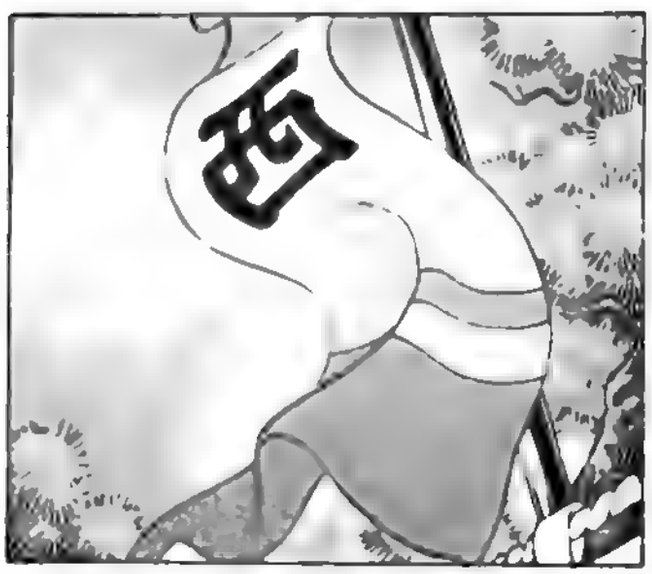
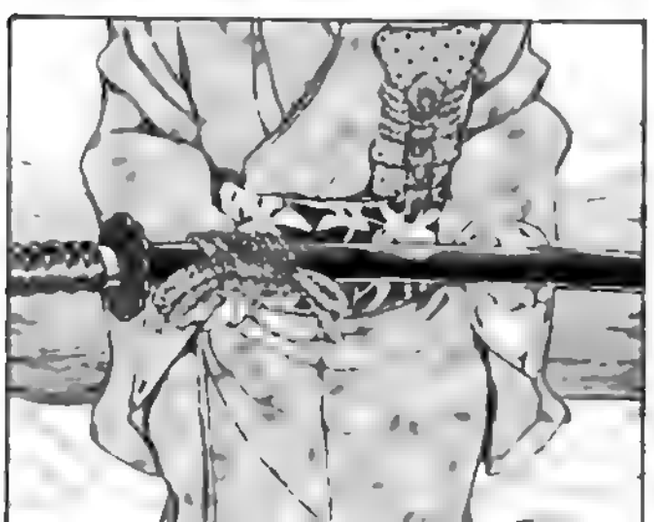
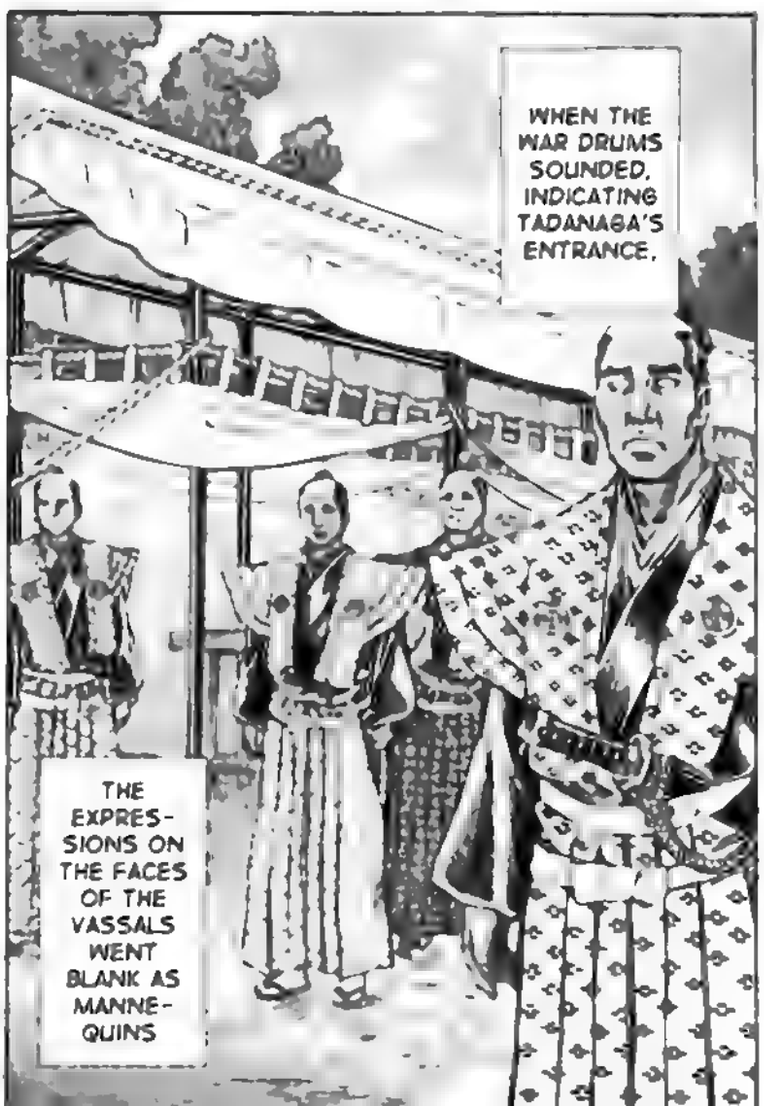
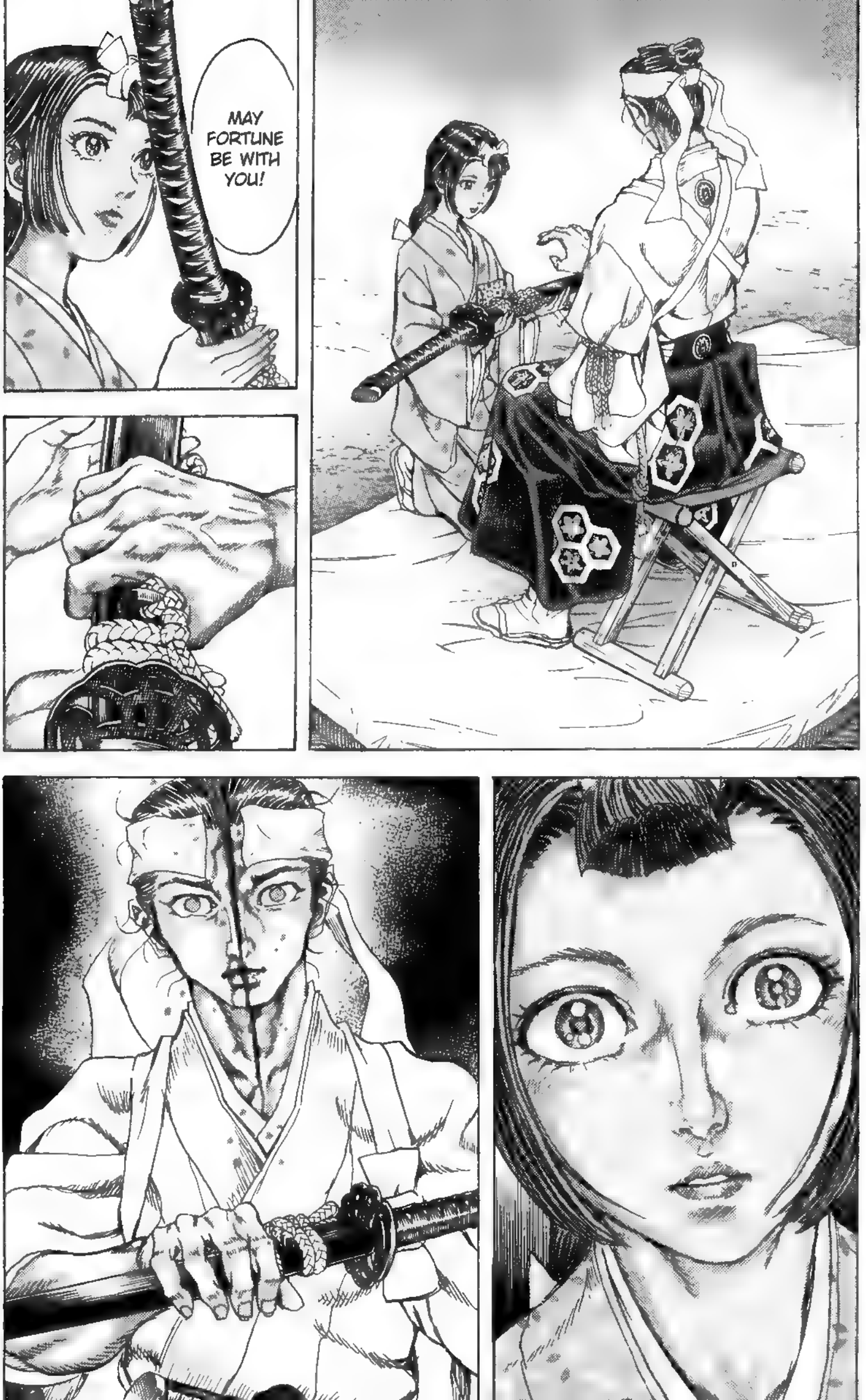





WHEN THE WAR DRUMS SOUNDED, INDICATING TADANAGA'S ENTRANCE,
THE EXPRES-SIONS ON THE FACES OF THE VASSALS WENT BLANK AS MANNE-QUINS

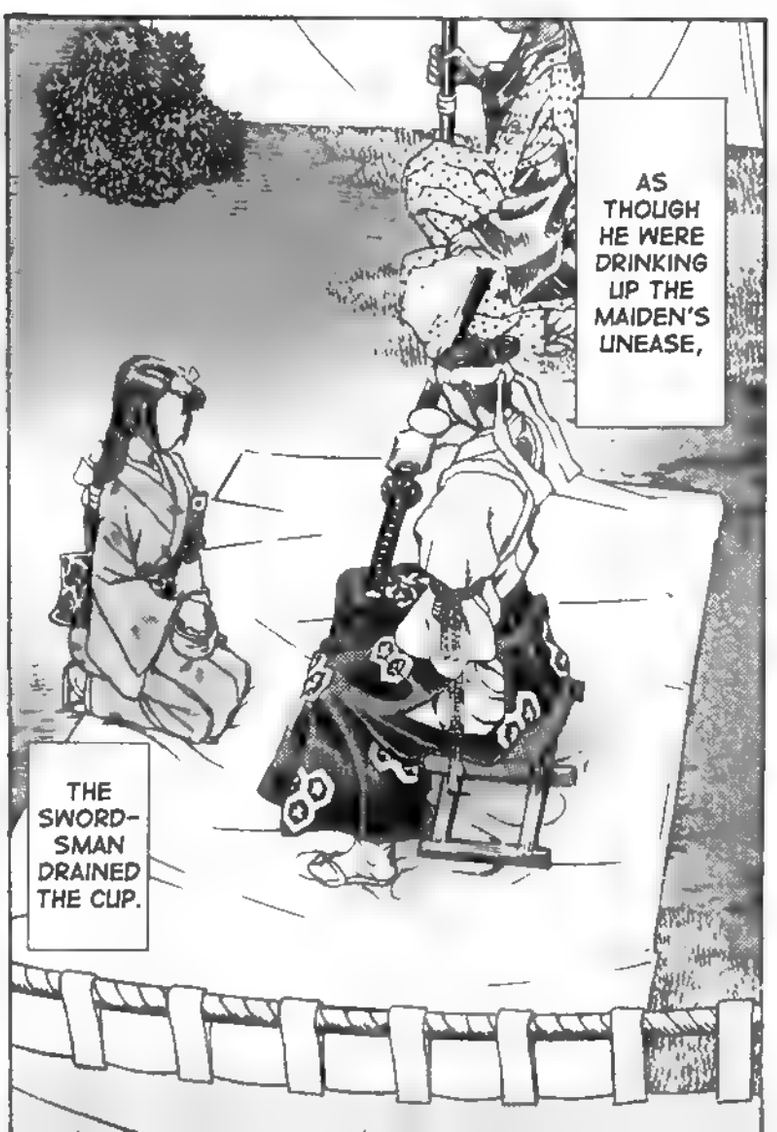

MAY FORTUNE BE WITH YOU!

IS THERE SOMETHING AMISS, MIE-DONO?

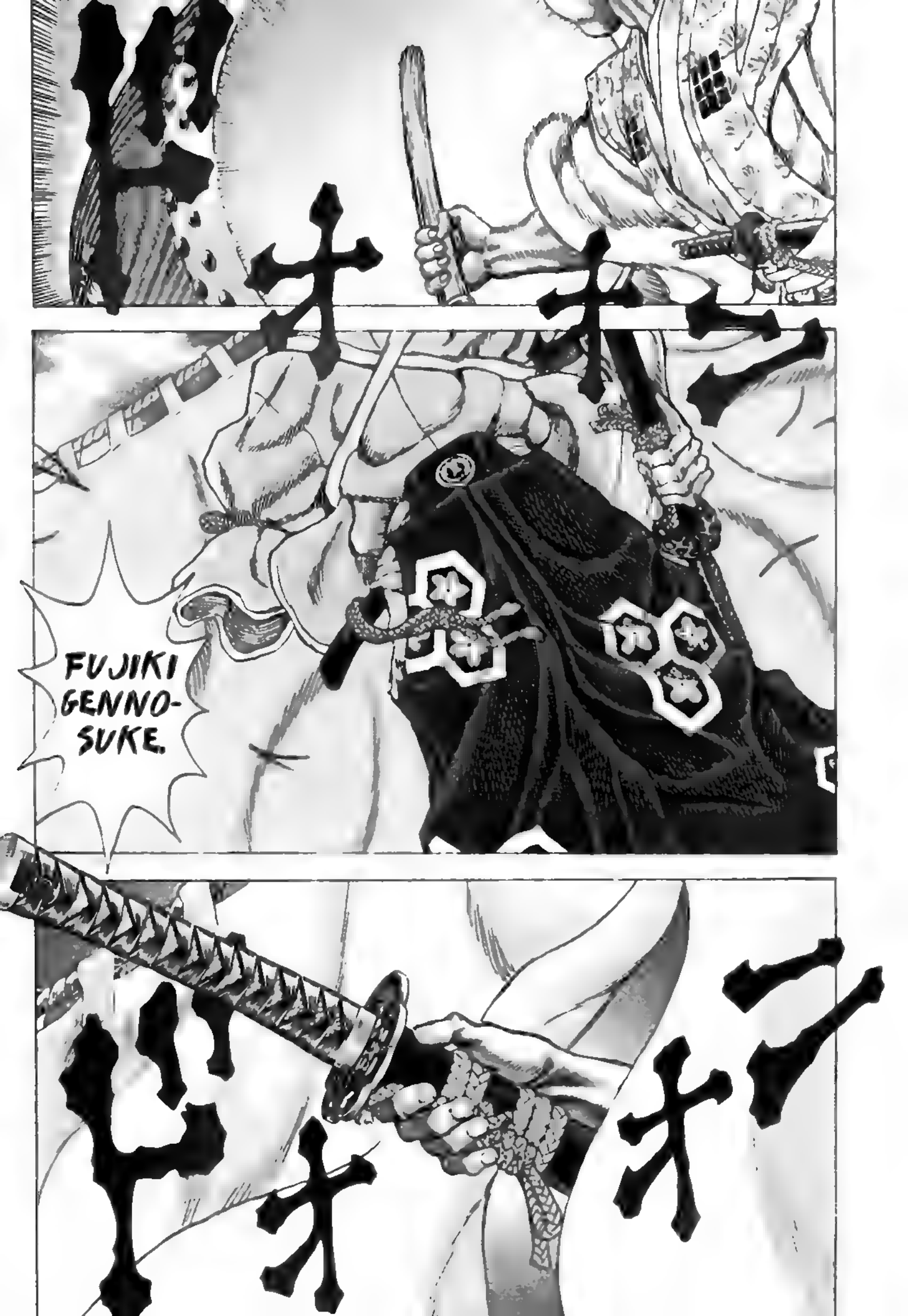
I HAD A VISION!
I SAW YOU EMERGING VICTORIOUS FROM THIS DUEL.

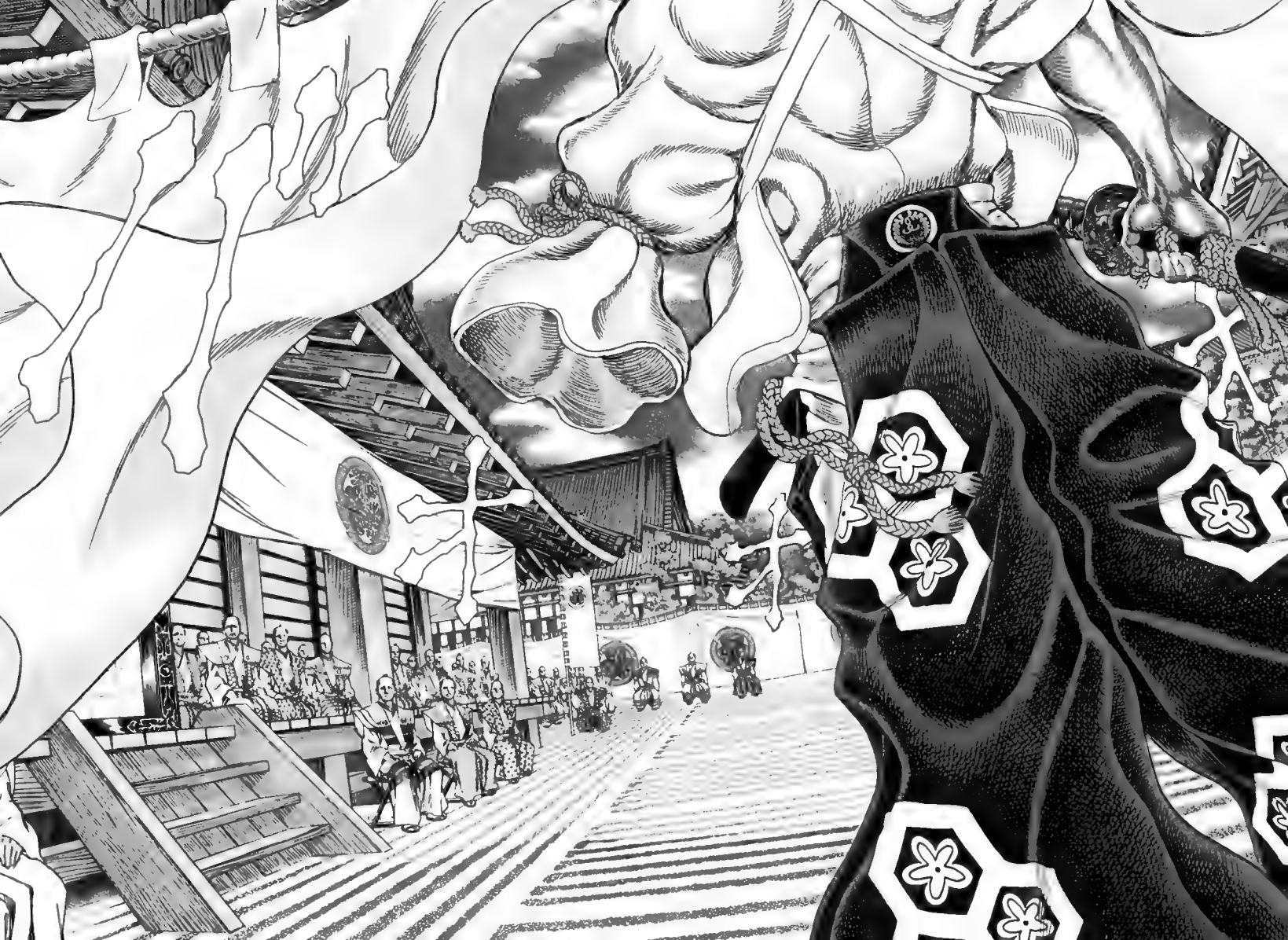
FUJIKI GENNO-SUKE-DONO,
THE TIME HAS COME.

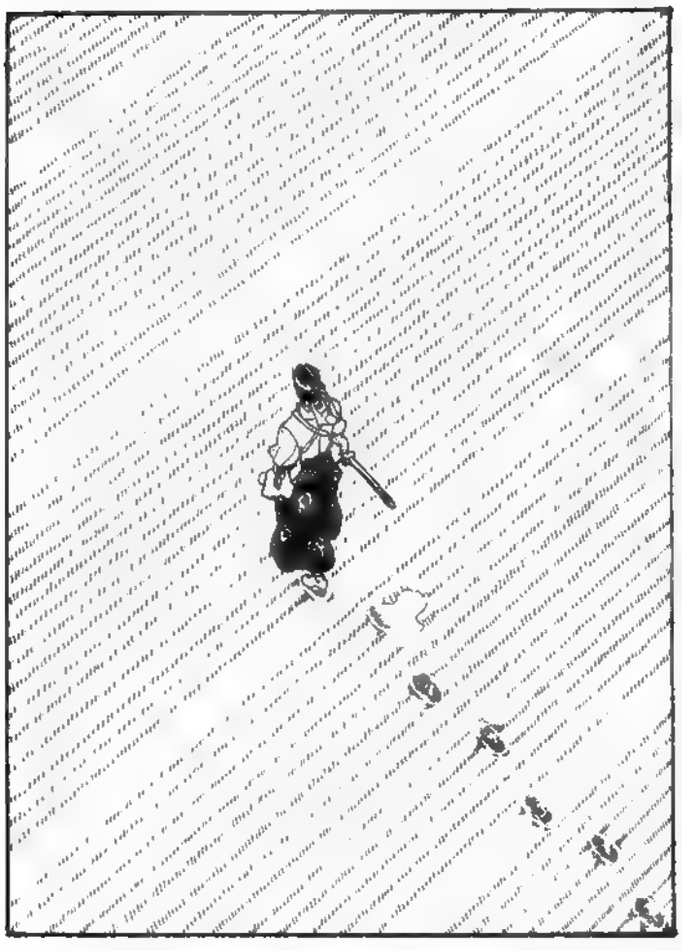
I am not going anywhere.


AS THOUGH HE WERE DRINKING UP THE MAIDEN'S UNEASE,
THE SWORD-SMAN DRAINED THE CUP.

FROM THE WEST...


FUJIKI
GENNO-
SUKE.

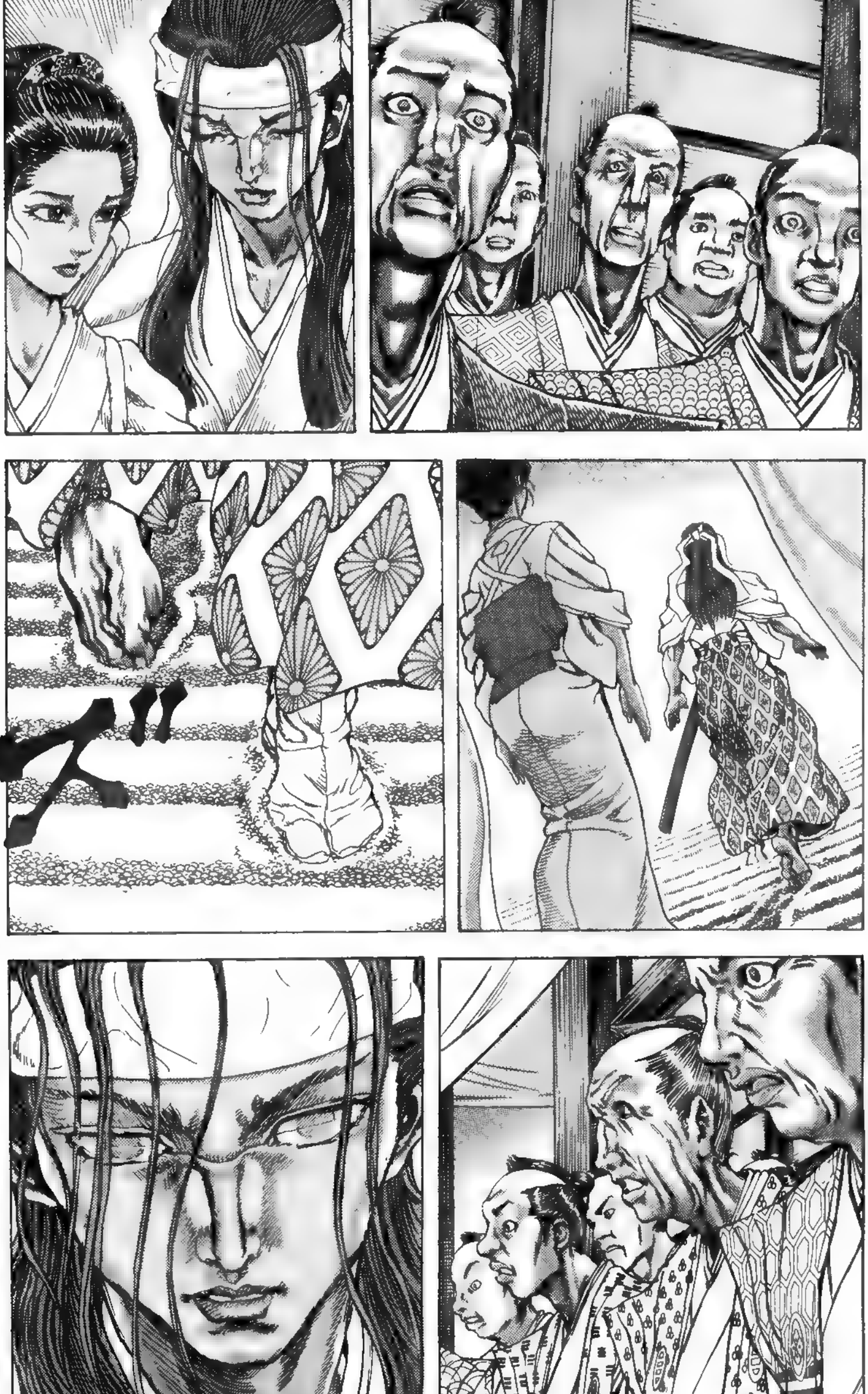


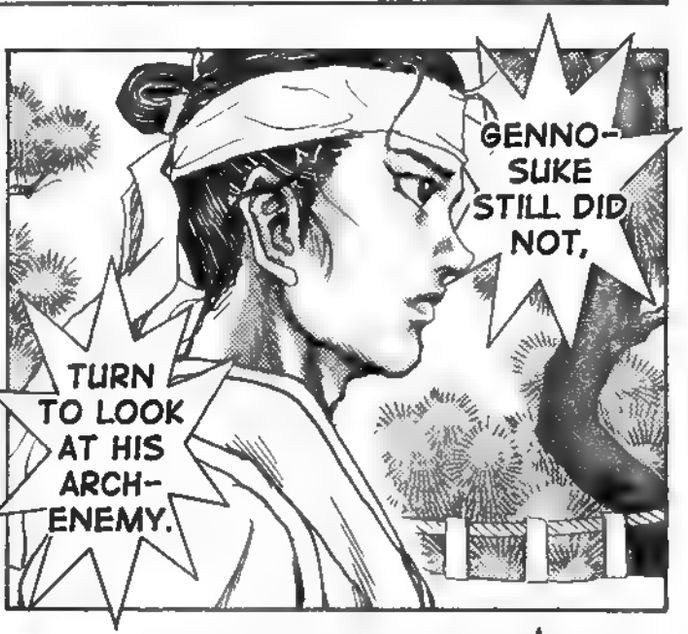


THE GAZE OF THE SPECTA-TORS,
FELL ON THE ONE-ARMED SWORDS-MAN.
"HE'S INFERIOR."
"HE'S DEFICIENT."
ANYONE WOULD,
SEE HIM IN THAT WAY.

THE SAME WAY HIS PARENTS LOOKED AT HIM WHEN HE WAS A CHILD.
HOWEVER, THAT ABOVE ALL DROVE HIM TO MERCILESSLY DESTROY HIS OPPONENT.
THAT WAS WHY HE HAD GROWN INTO A DEMON ON THE FIELD!

FROM THE EAST, IRAKO SEIGEN.




GENNO-SUKE STILL DID NOT,
TURN TO LOOK AT HIS ARCH-ENEMY.

HE SEETHED WITH EMOTION,

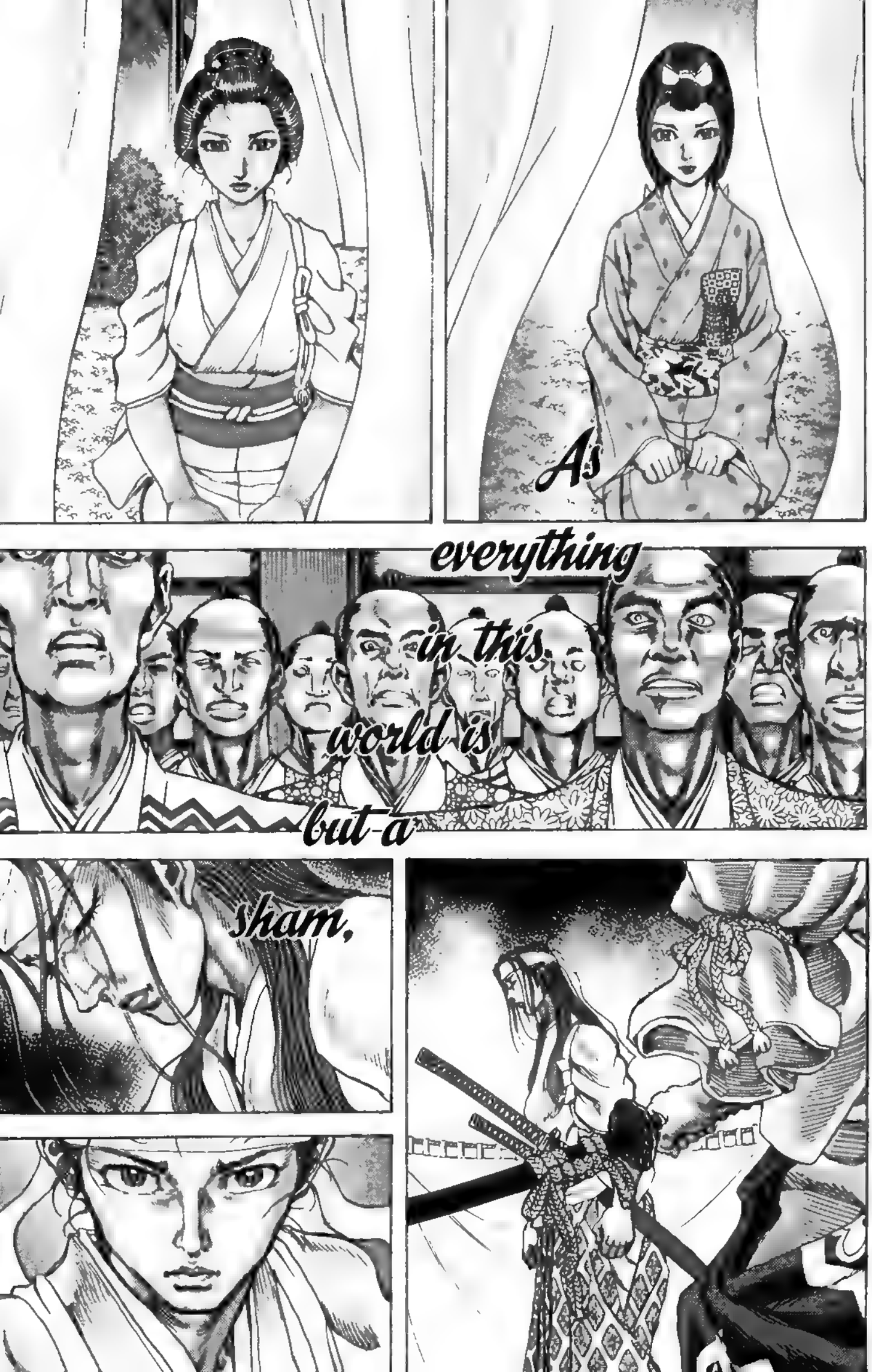
HIS NERVES STRAINED TO THE BREAKING POINT.

THE SOUND OF HIS DRAGGING FOOT,
FORETOLD EVER MORE HIGHLY DEVELOPED SWORDS-MANSHIP.

FUJIKI GENNO-SUKE.
IRAKO SEIGEN.

DO NOT HESITATE TO USE YOUR SKILLS TO THE UTMOST TO SATISFY OUR LORD.
BOTH OF YOU SHALL NOT HOLD BACK.

AT LAST GENNO-SUKE,
BEHELD SEIGEN!



*Reply poem in the Hagakure to the poem quoted from Sugawara no Michizane. Translation by William Scott Wilson.

Death
is
the
only
sincerity.

CHAPTER 82
WHITE BLADE

THEIR HEARTS HAVING BEEN JOINED TOGETHER IN THE STORM OF CHERRY BLOSSOMS,
GENNOSUKE MUST HAVE KNOWN WHO IT WAS THAT DWELT IN THE MAIDEN'S BREAST,

AND THAT MIE HAD SUPPRESSED THE EVIL SPIRIT LURKING IN THE DEPTHS OF HER HEART,

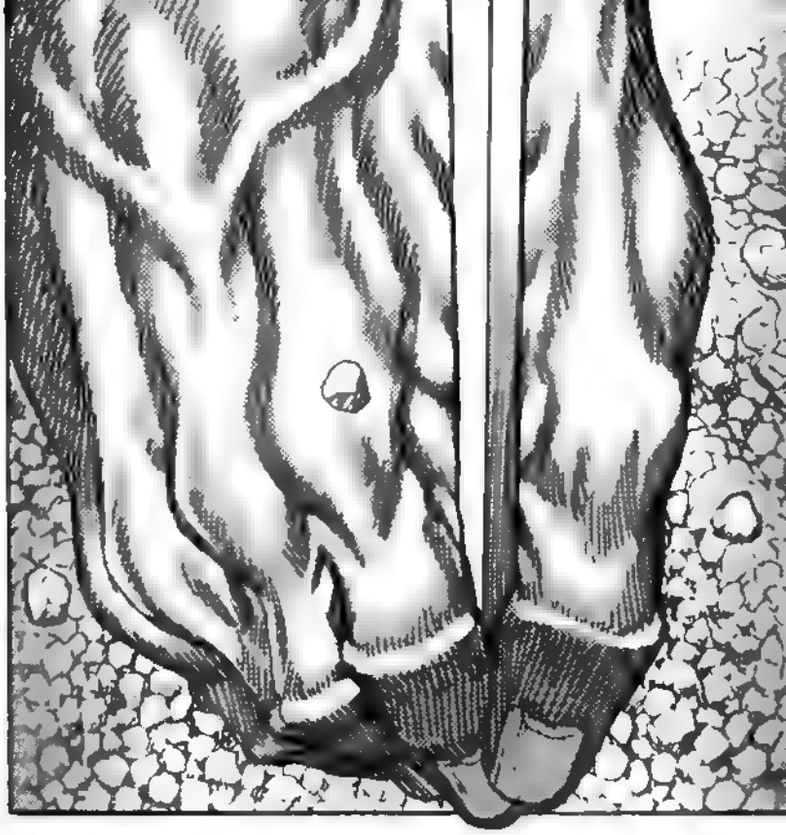
PLEASE KILL HIM.

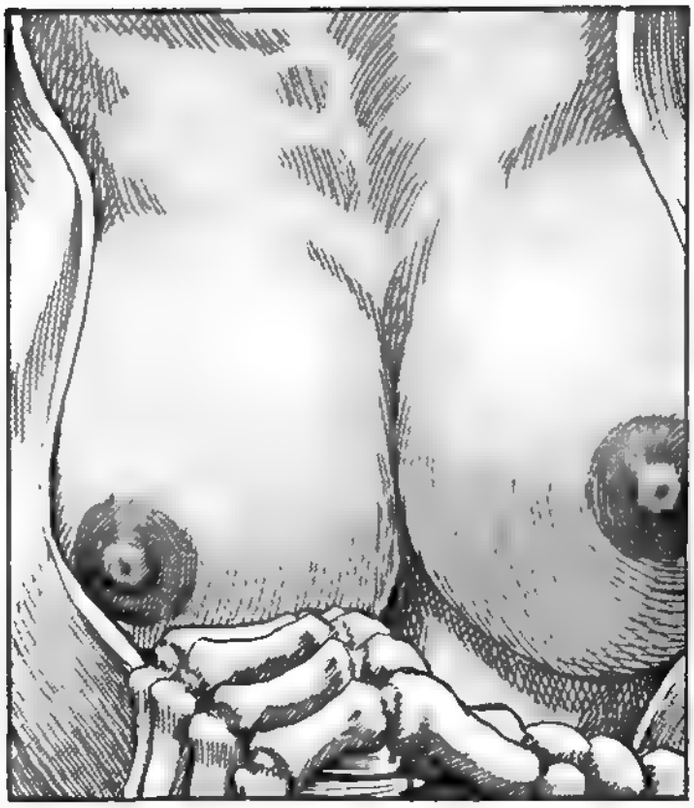
IN ORDER TO EXCHANGE THAT ETERNAL VOW.

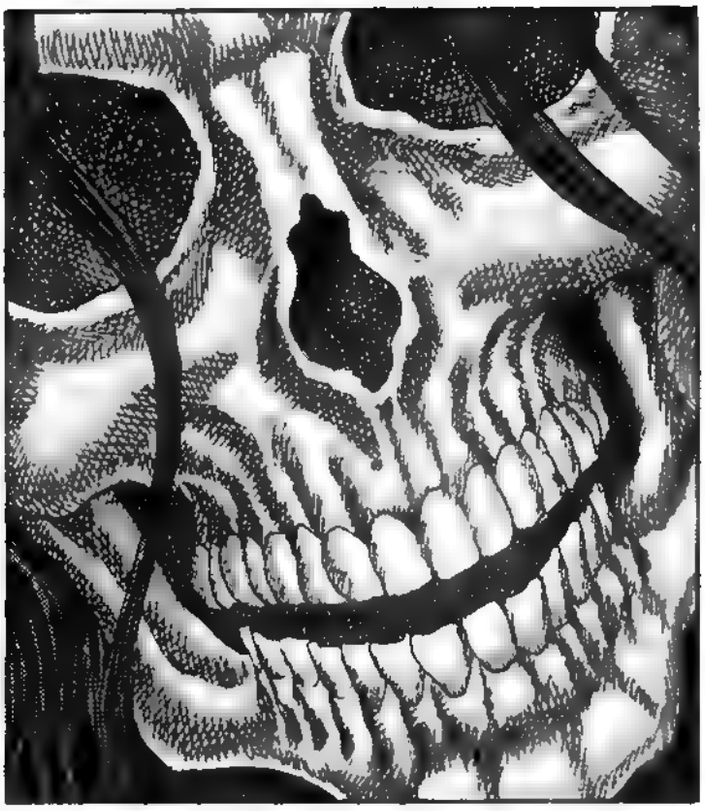
FUJIKI GENNOSUKE NOW,

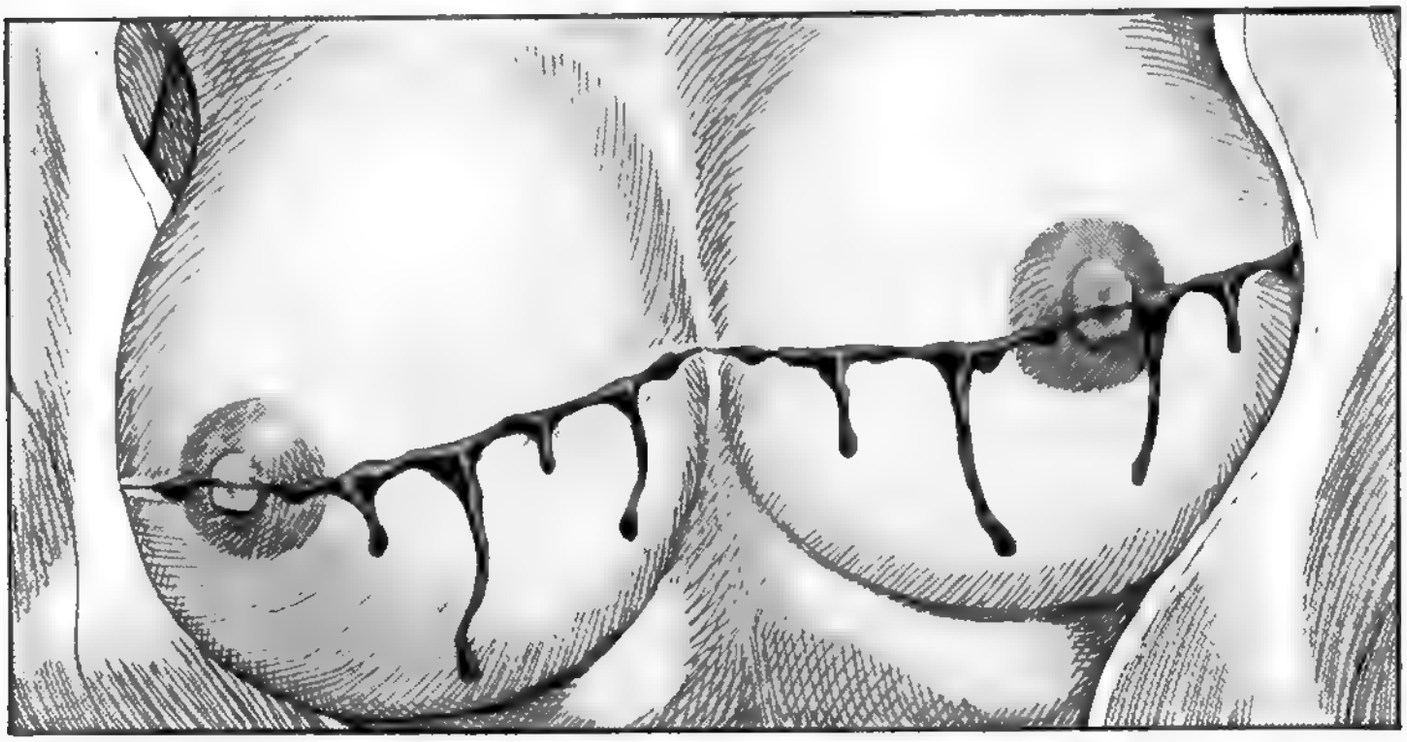
DREW THE DEMON SWORD OF FATE.

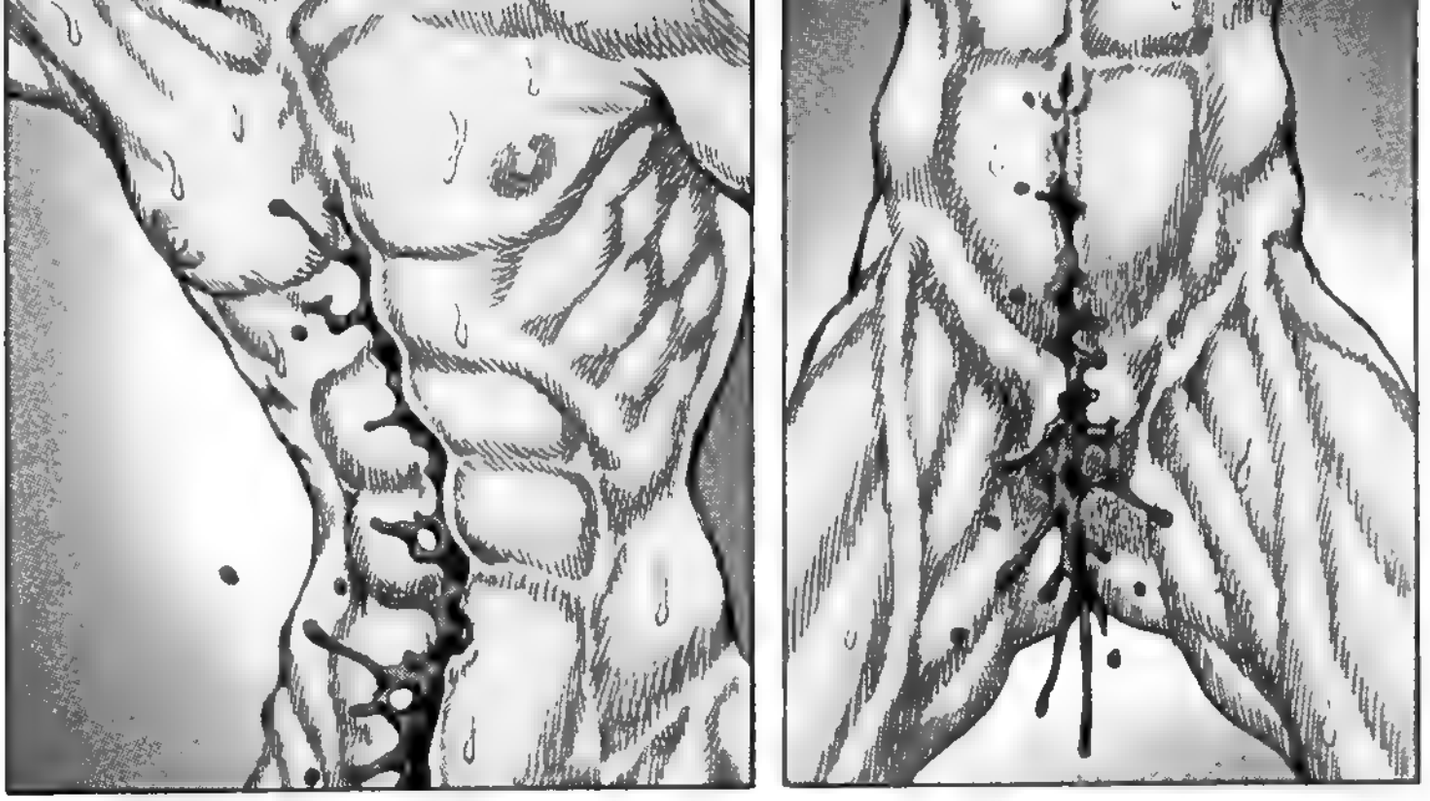
AH, THAT'S IT...



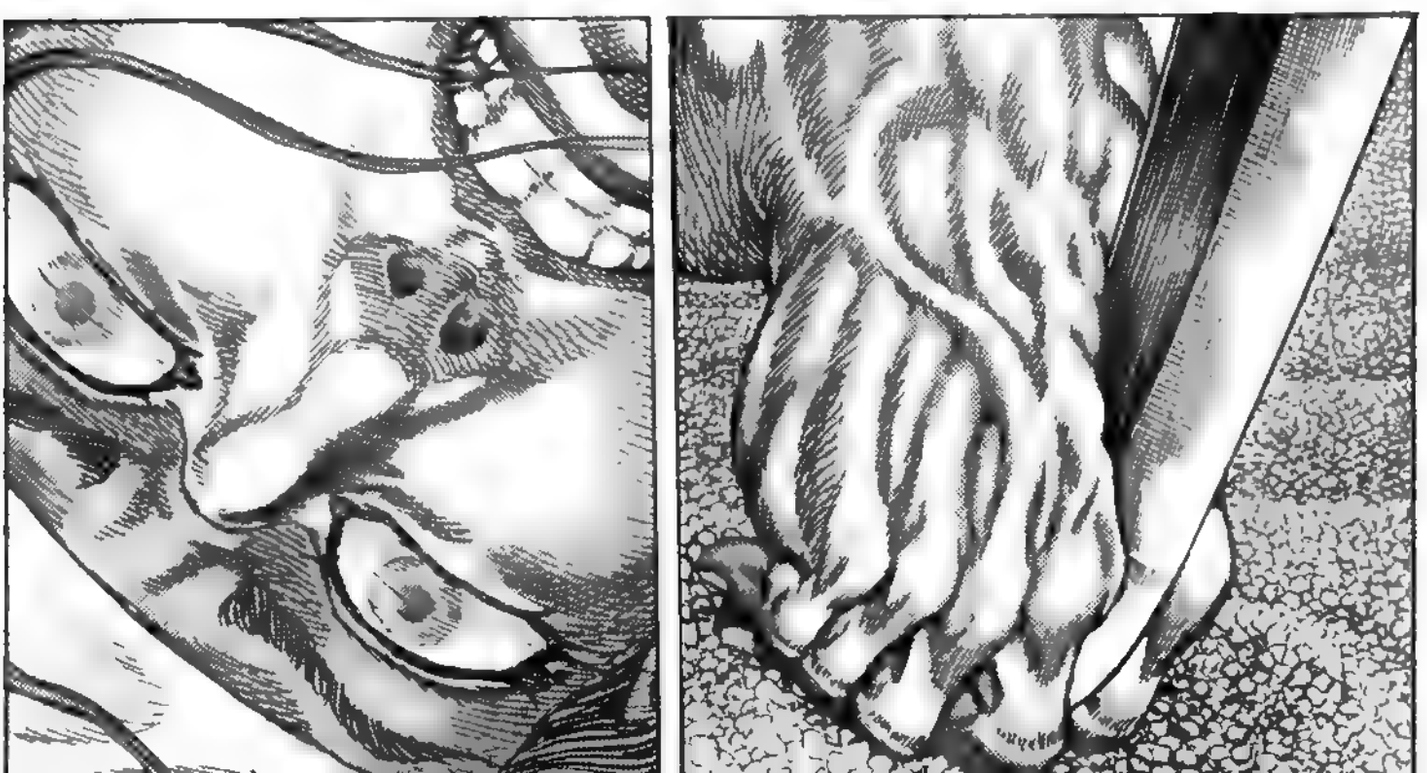








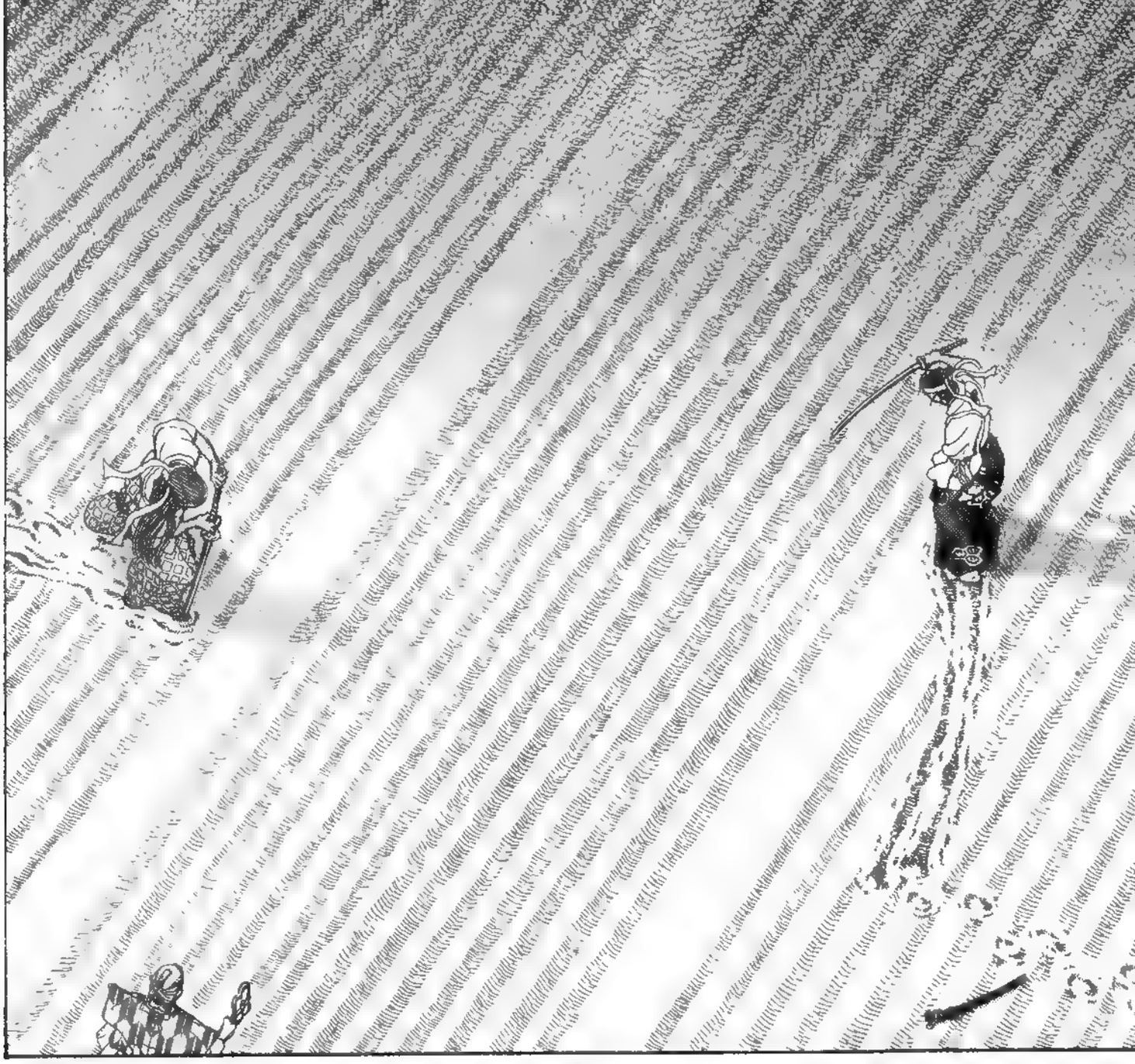
You monster!

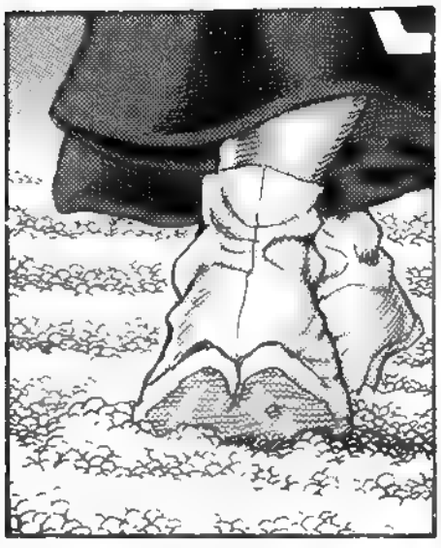


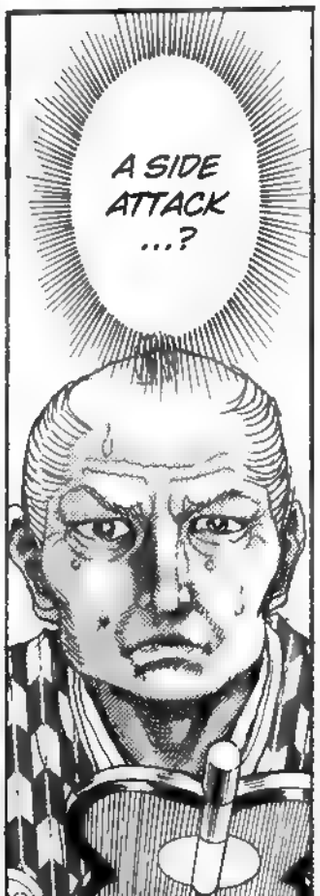
ALL WHO WERE GATHERED IN THAT PLACE,
WERE MESMERIZED BY SEIGEN'S BIZARRE STANCE.
EVEN TADANAGA, THE SURUGA DAINAGON...

THIS POWER OF ATTRACTION ITSELF,
WAS A PART OF SEIGEN'S DEADLY TECHNIQUE.

THE SUN IS IN HIS EYES ...
HH






A SIDE ATTACK ...?

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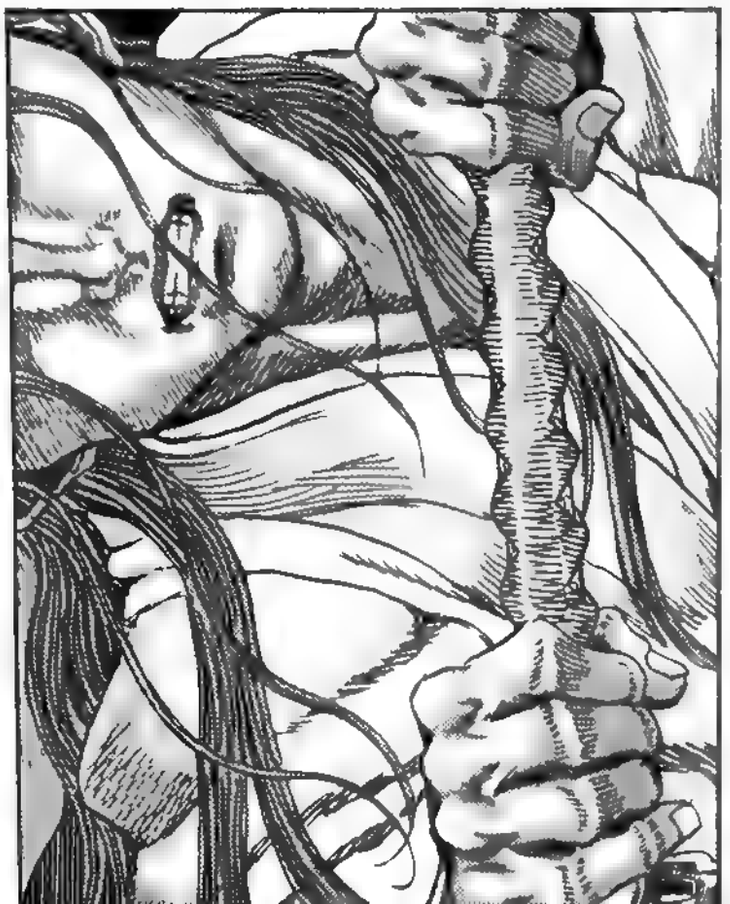
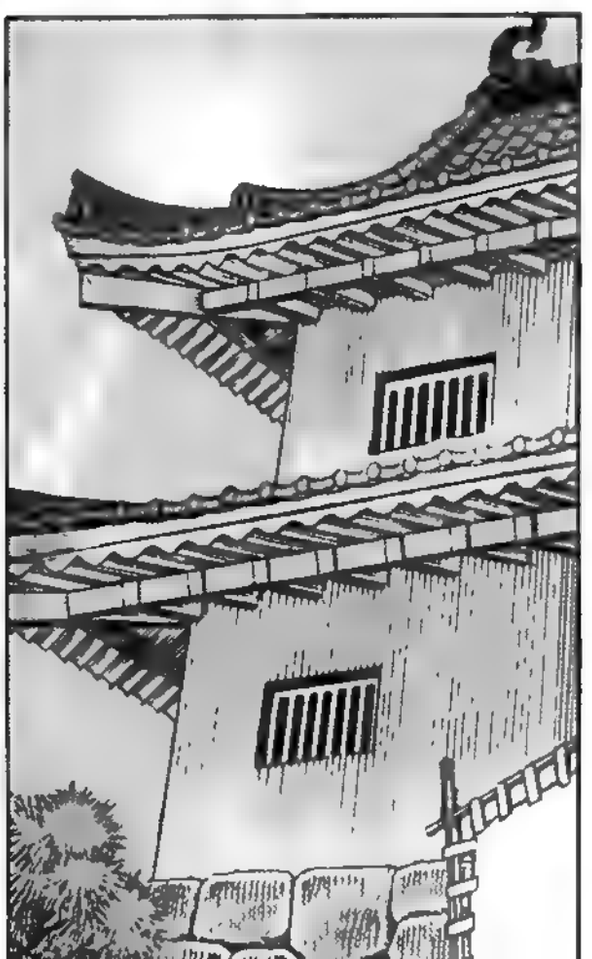
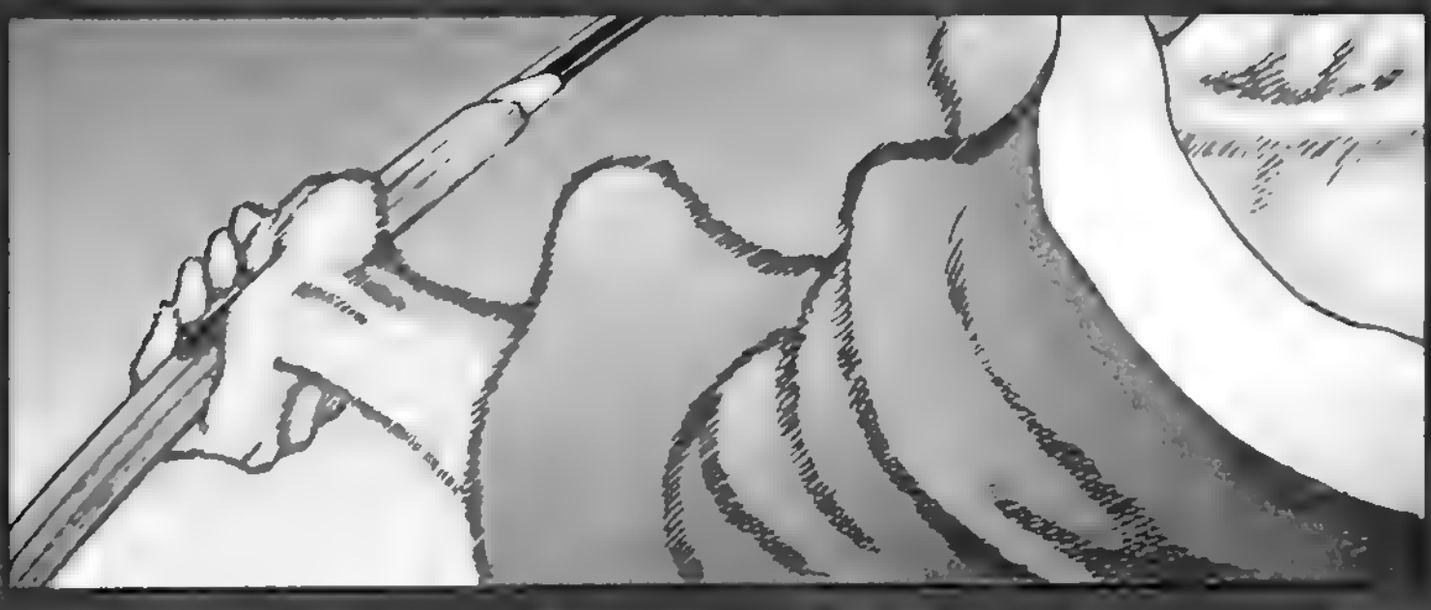
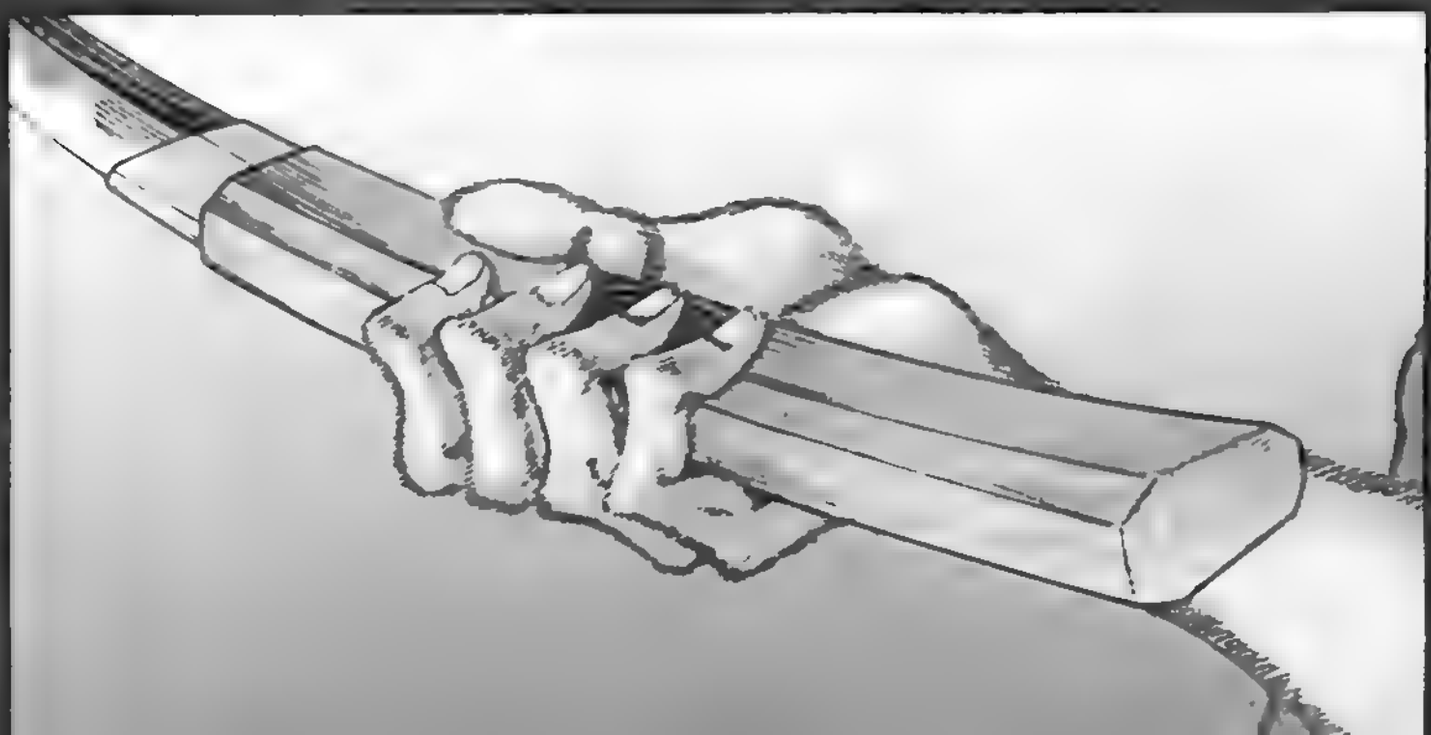
ドクン
THE SAMURAI BEHELD THE TOURNAMENT WITH BAITED BREATH.
THE STILLNESS, EVEN GREATER THAN DURING THEIR VENGEANCE MATCH,
SHARPENED THE SENSES OF THE BLIND DRAGON.

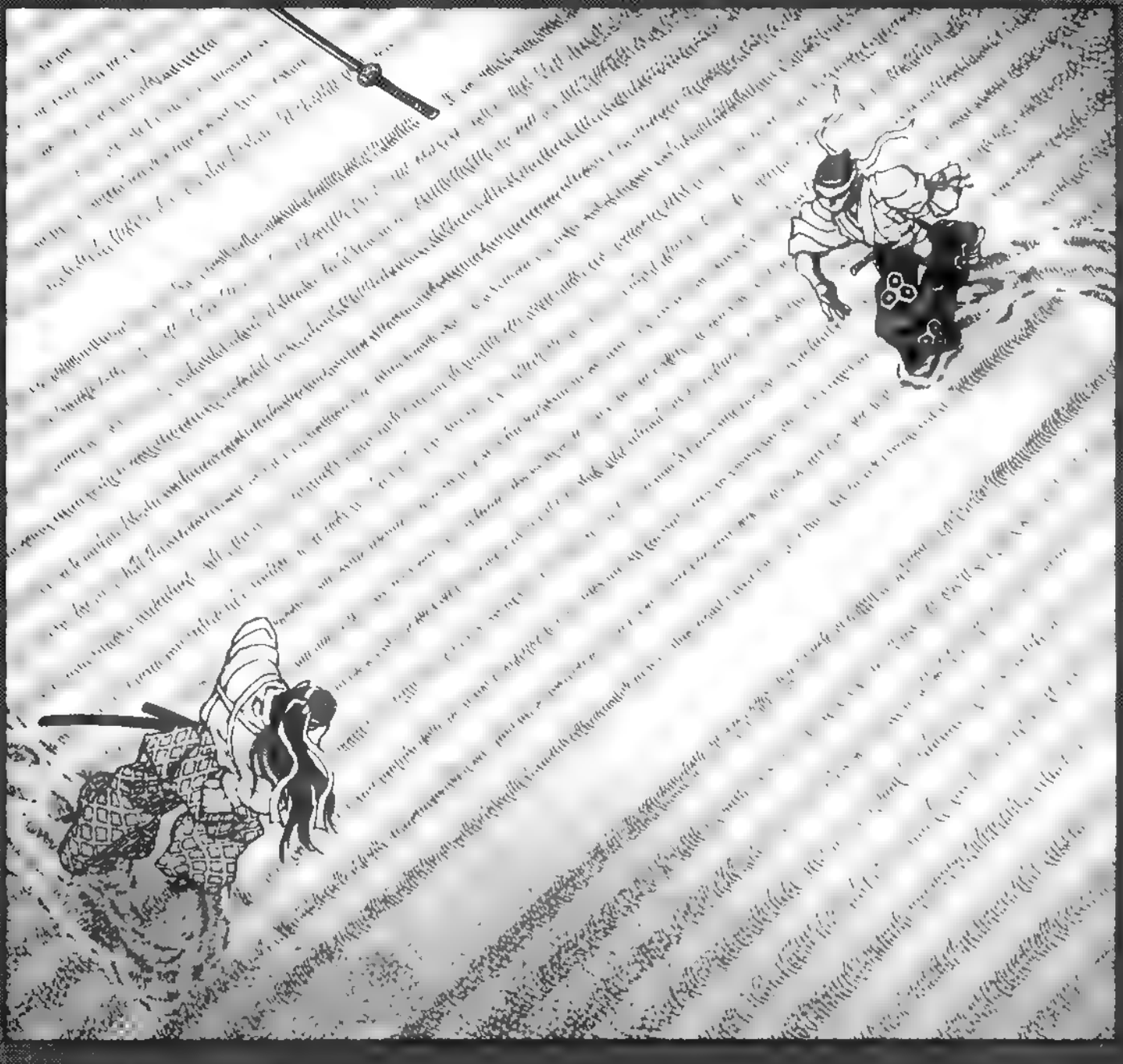


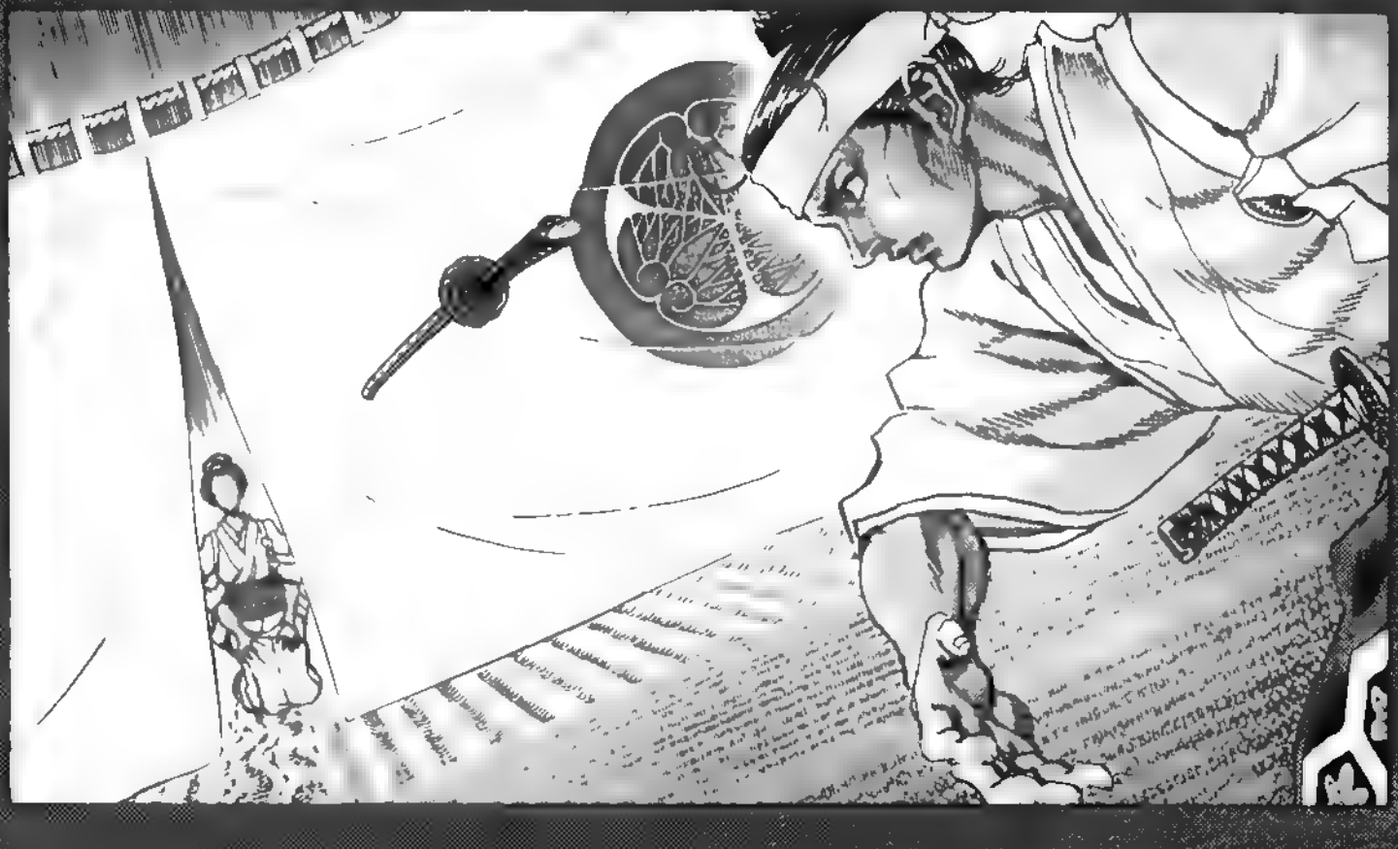


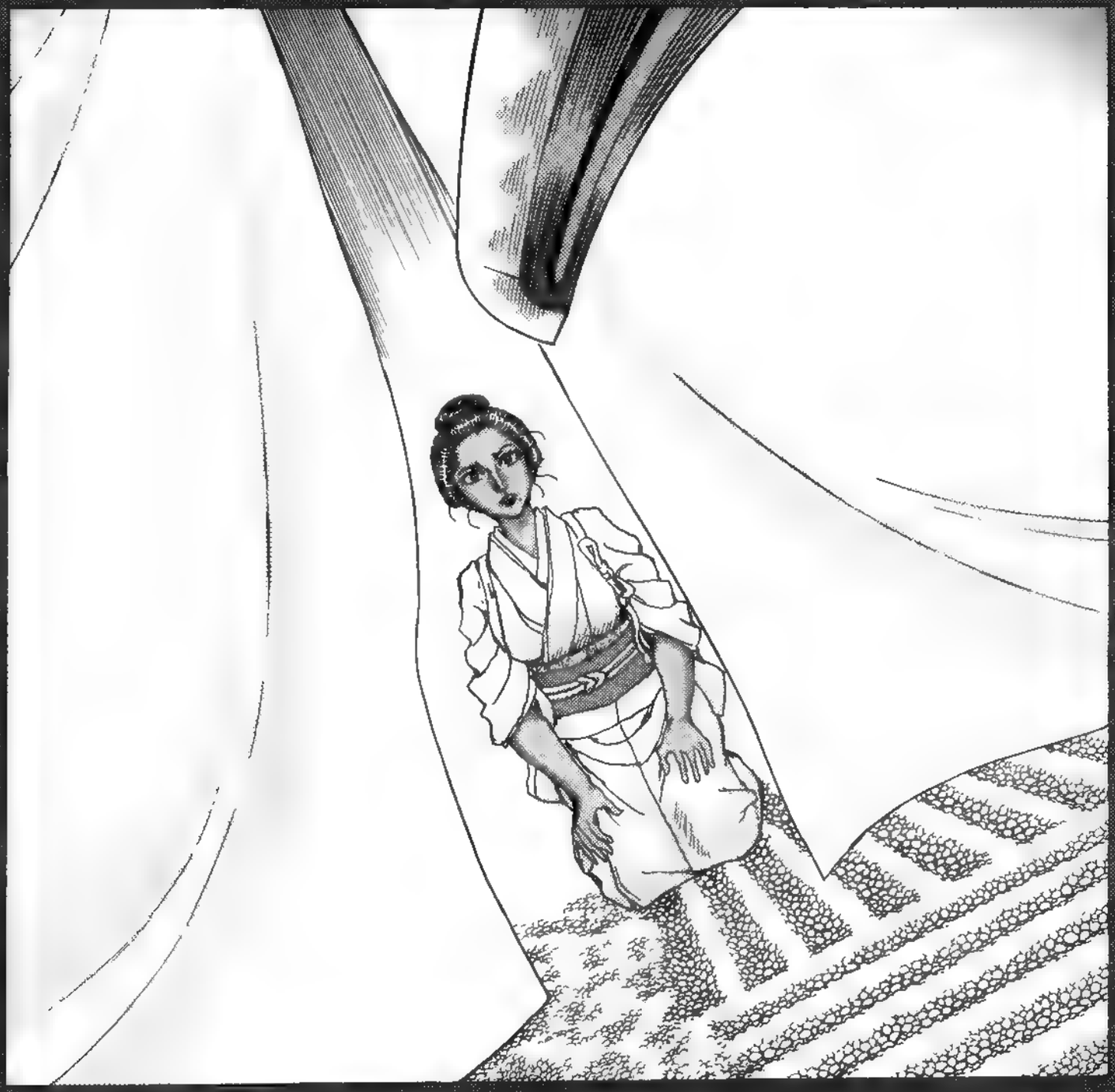


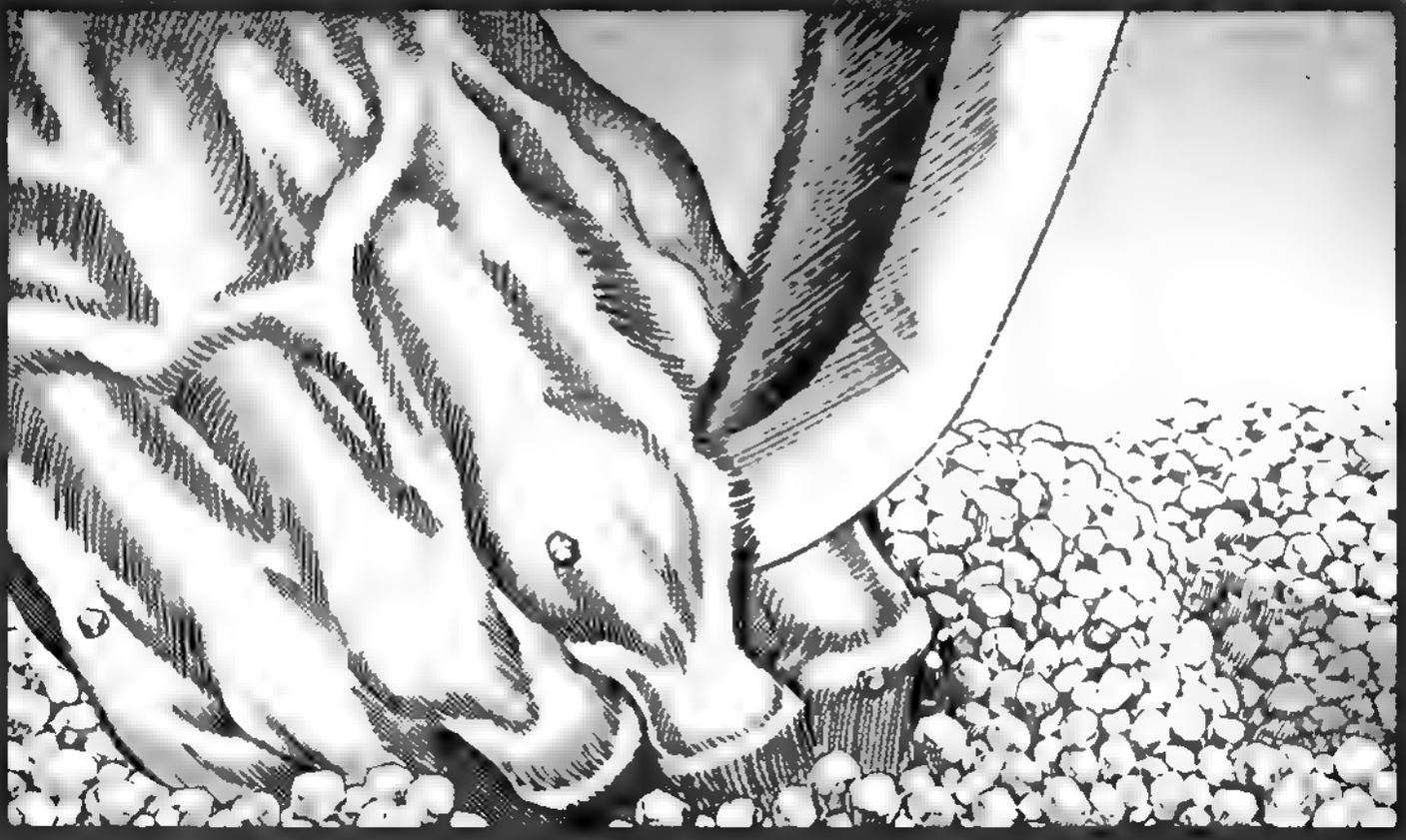


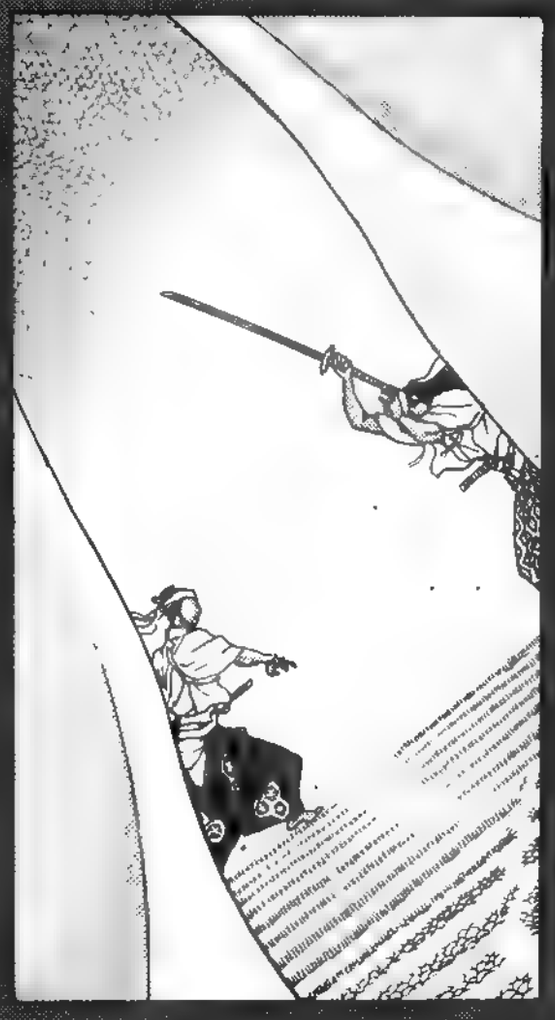
CHAPTER 83
TSUBAZEMARI

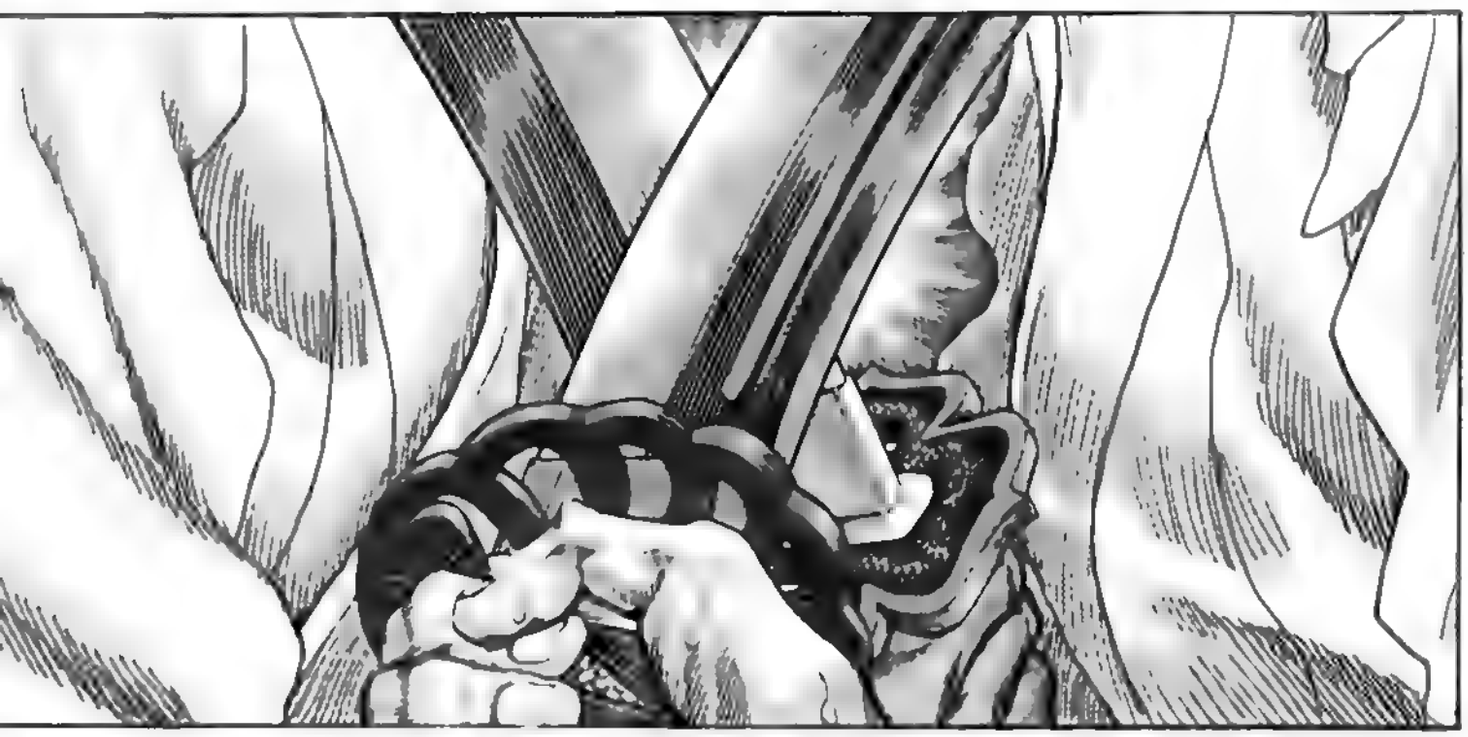


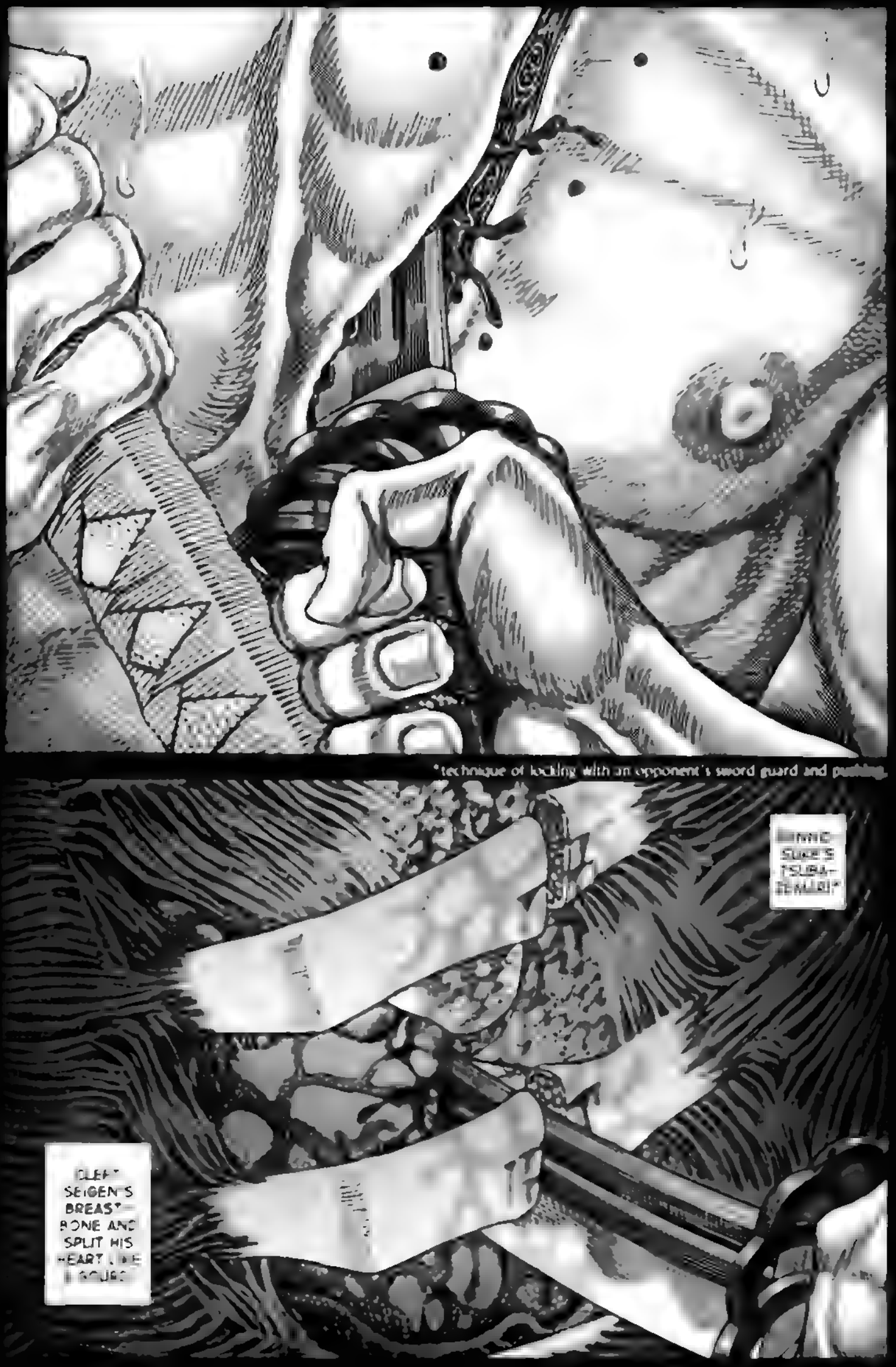


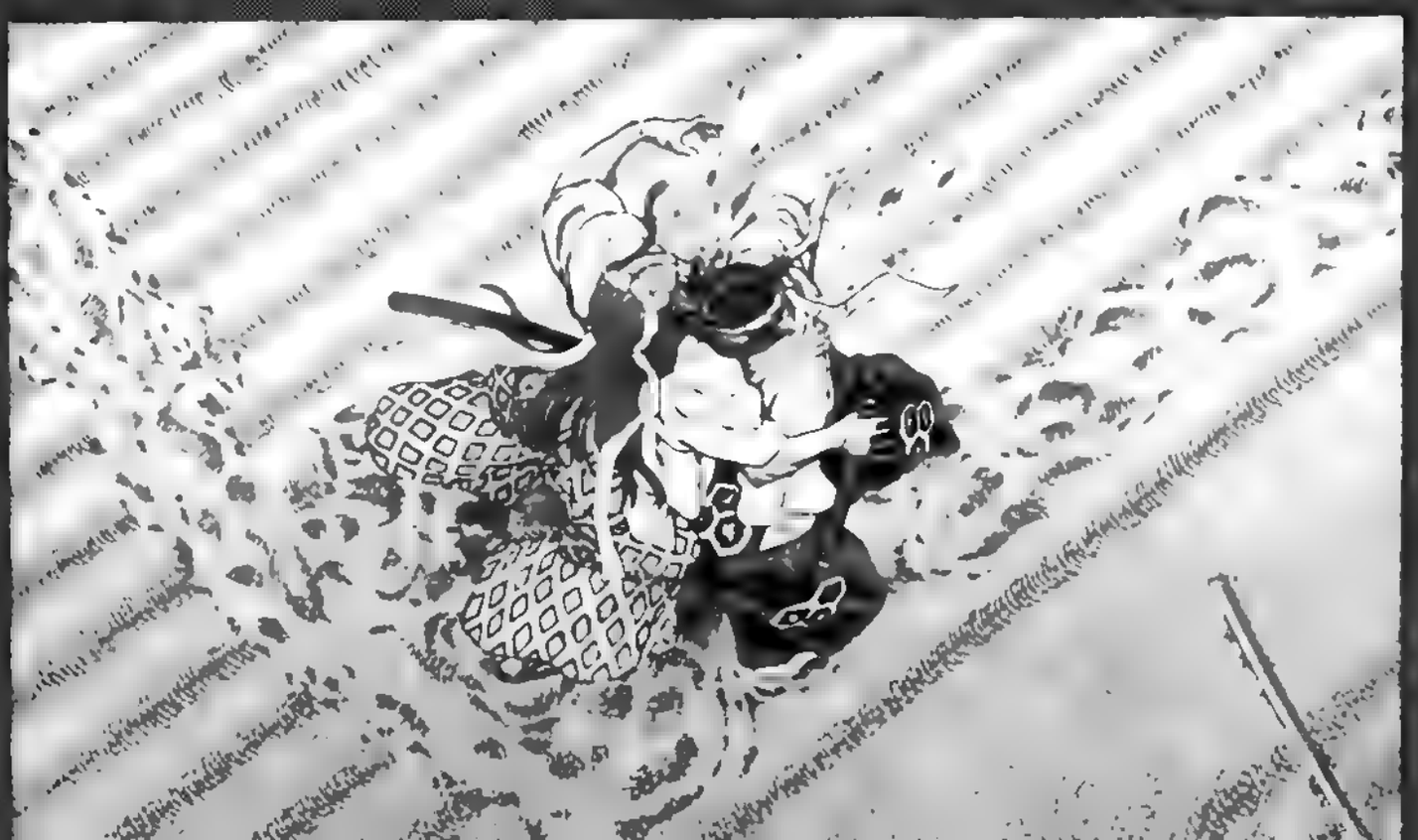


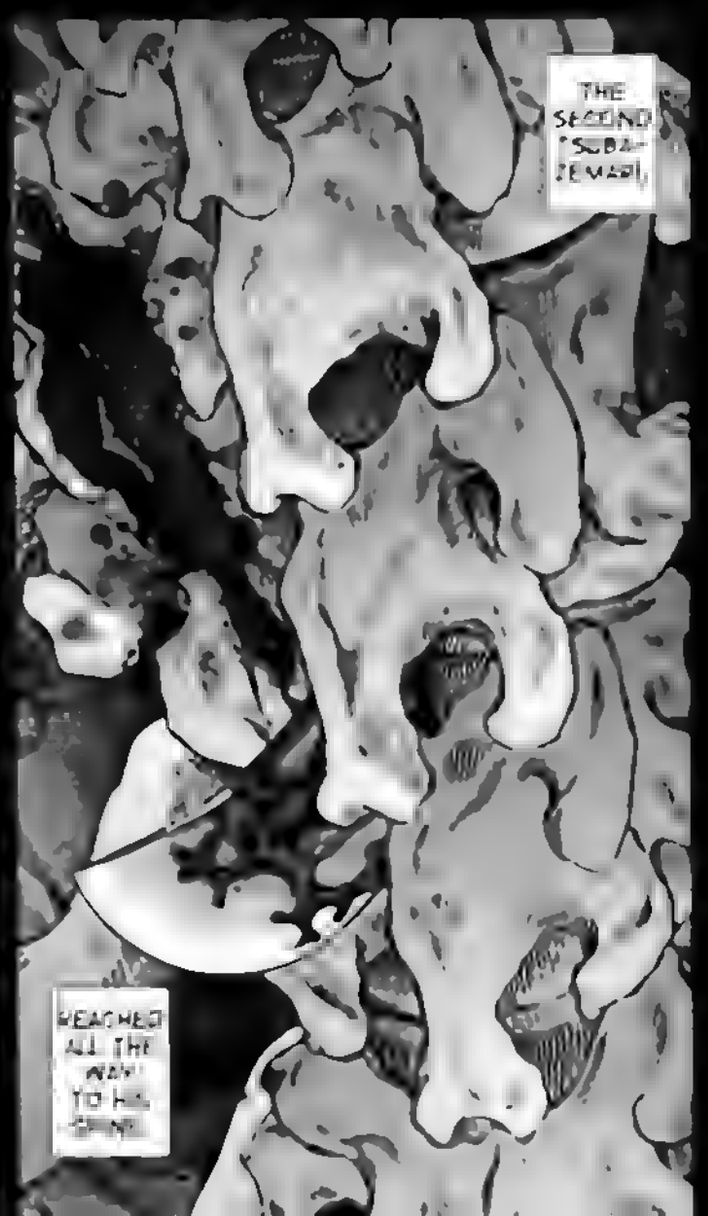






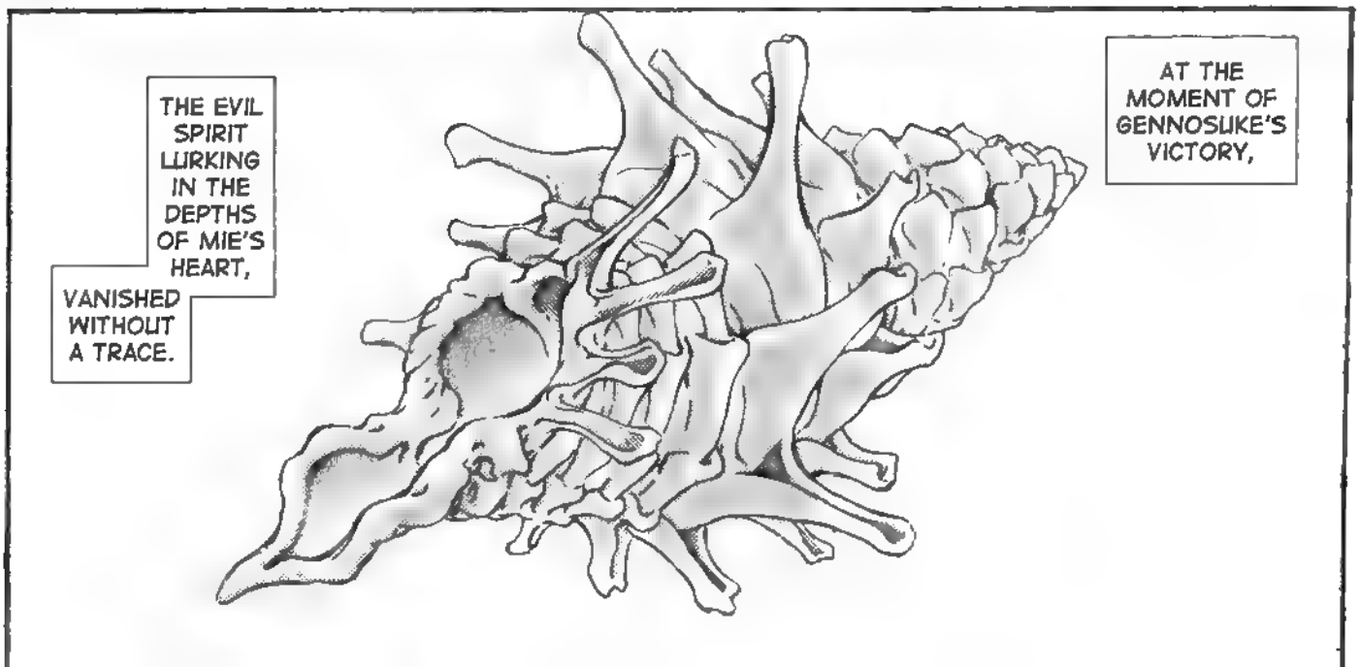

*technique of locking with an opponent's sword guard and pushing.
...NNG SUKE'S TSUBA-ZE-HAJIRI!*
CLEFT SEIGEN'S BREAST-BONE AND SPLIT HIS HEART LIKE A GOURD.



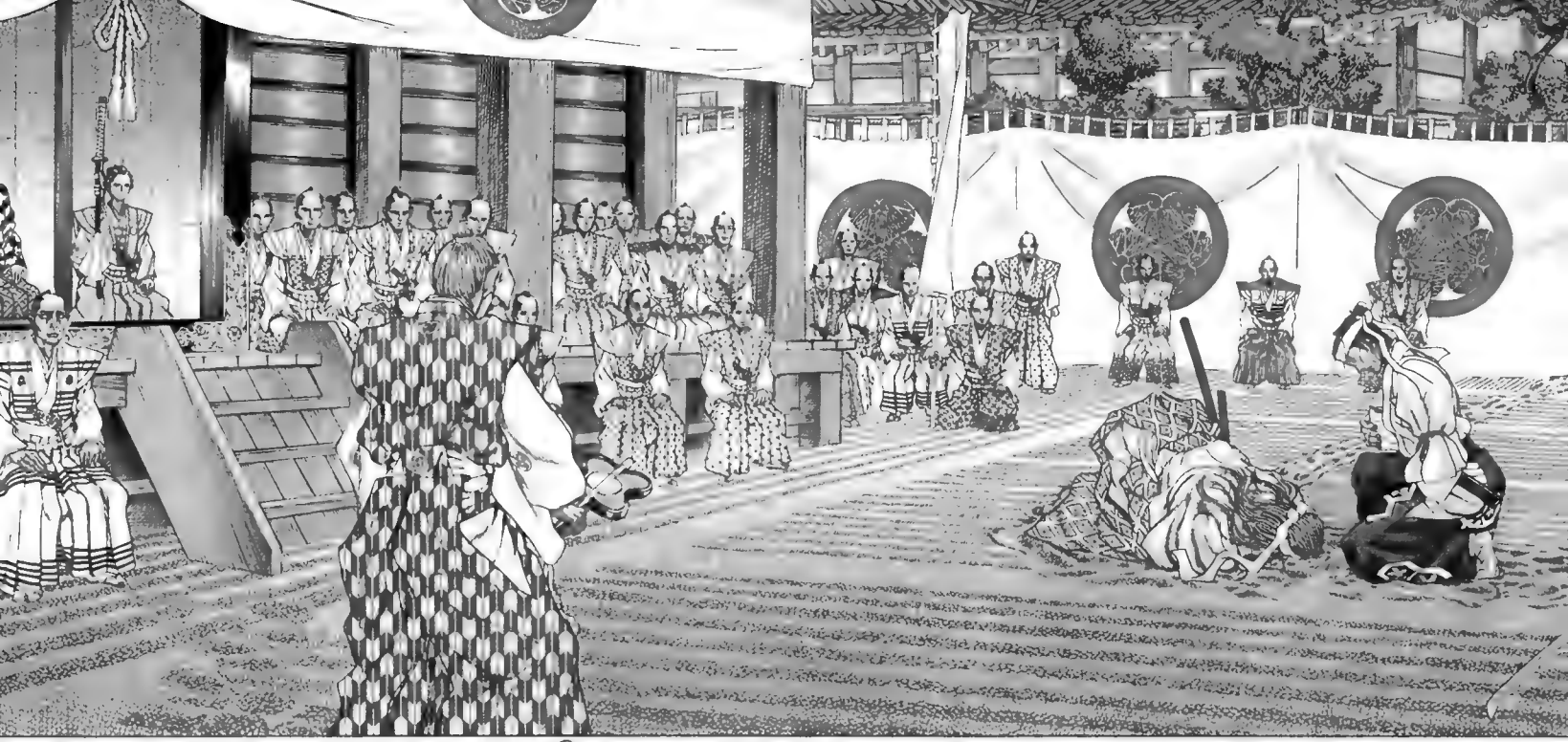

THE SECOND "SCUBA-ZEMAR"
REACHED ALL THE WAY TO HIS CHIN!

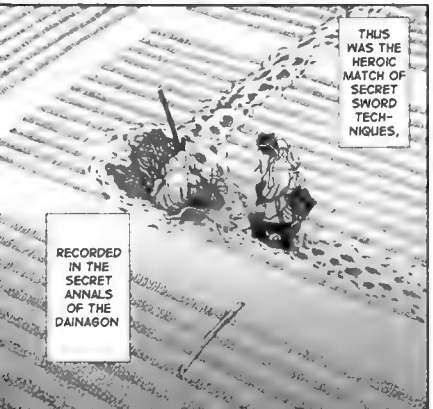
HAD THERE BEEN A DAY WHEN GENNOSUKE DID NOT THINK ON SEIGEN?
SINCE THAT SUMMER DAY THEY MET.

IRAKO
...


THE EVIL SPIRIT LURKING IN THE DEPTHS OF MIE'S HEART,
VANISHED WITHOUT A TRACE.
AT THE MOMENT OF GENNOSUKE'S VICTORY,

FINAL CHAPTER
PURE CRIMSON



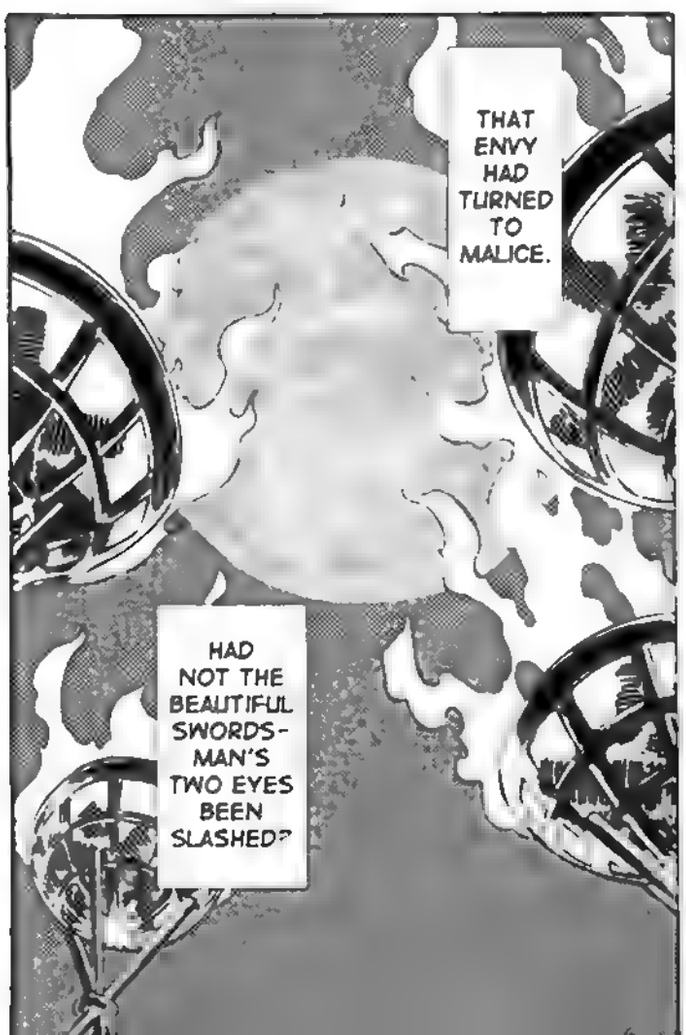

THUS WAS THE HEROIC MATCH OF SECRET SWORD TECH-NIQUES,
RECORDED IN THE SECRET ANNALS OF THE DAINAGON

WHILE THE BLIND SWORDS-MAN, AS EXPECTED, HAD FAILED TO STRIKE HIS OPPO-NENT.

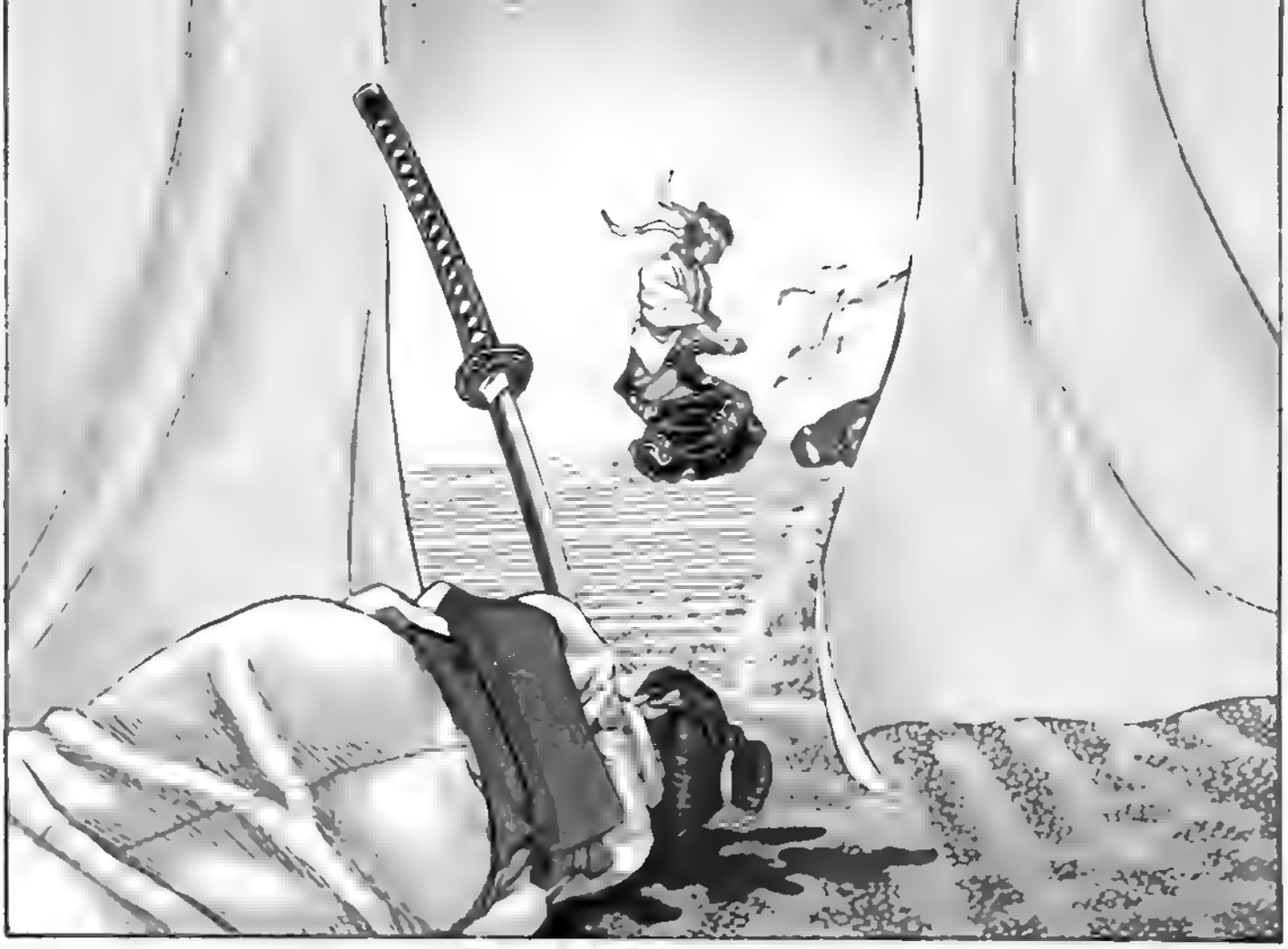
THE ONE-ARMED SWORDSMAN HAD FLUNG AWAY HIS SWORD, UNABLE TO SUPPORT ITS WEIGHT.

HE HAD BEEN DAZZLED.

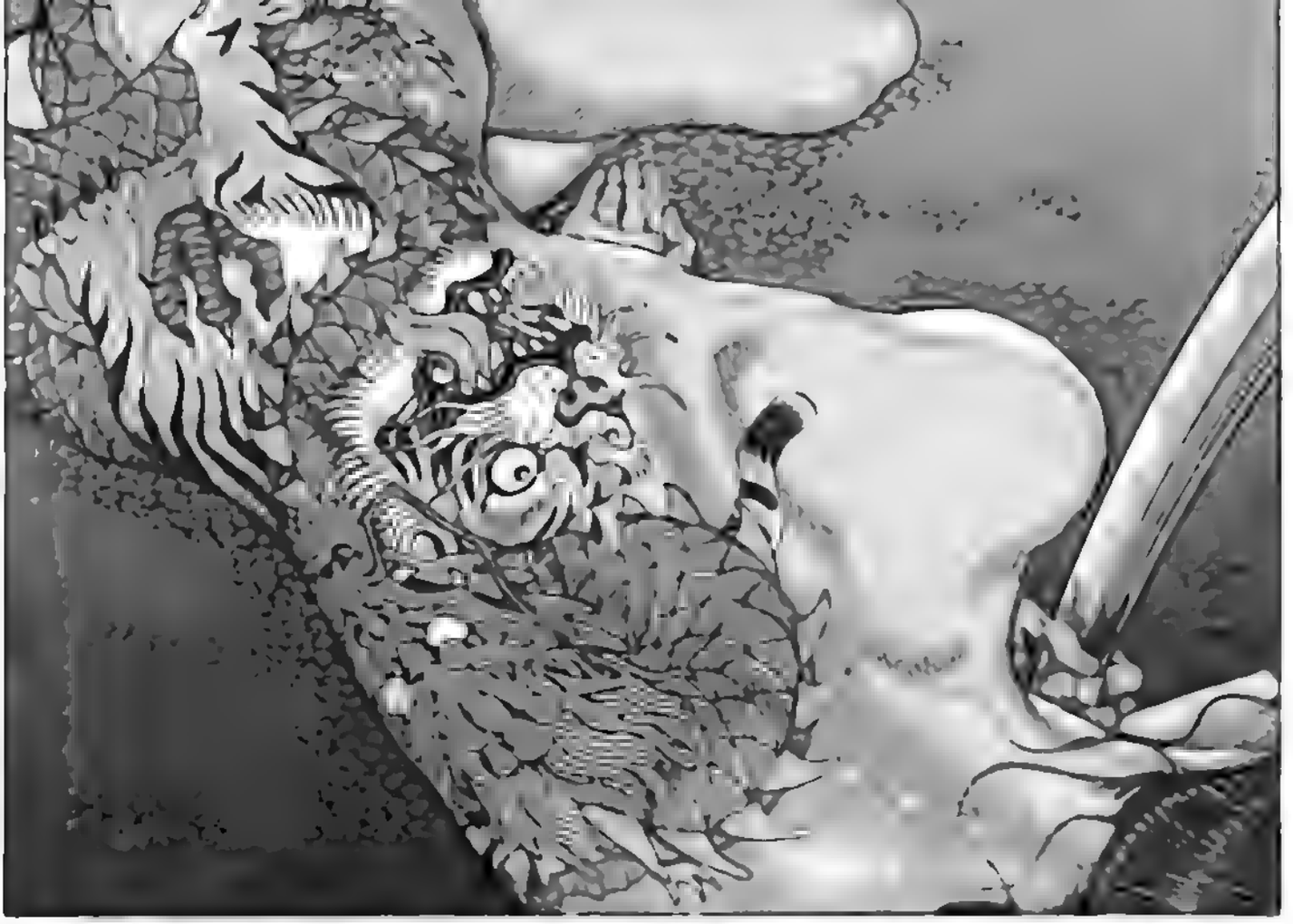
HE HAD HAD TO KILL HIM
BECAUSE OF THE DAZZLING BRIGHT-NESS,

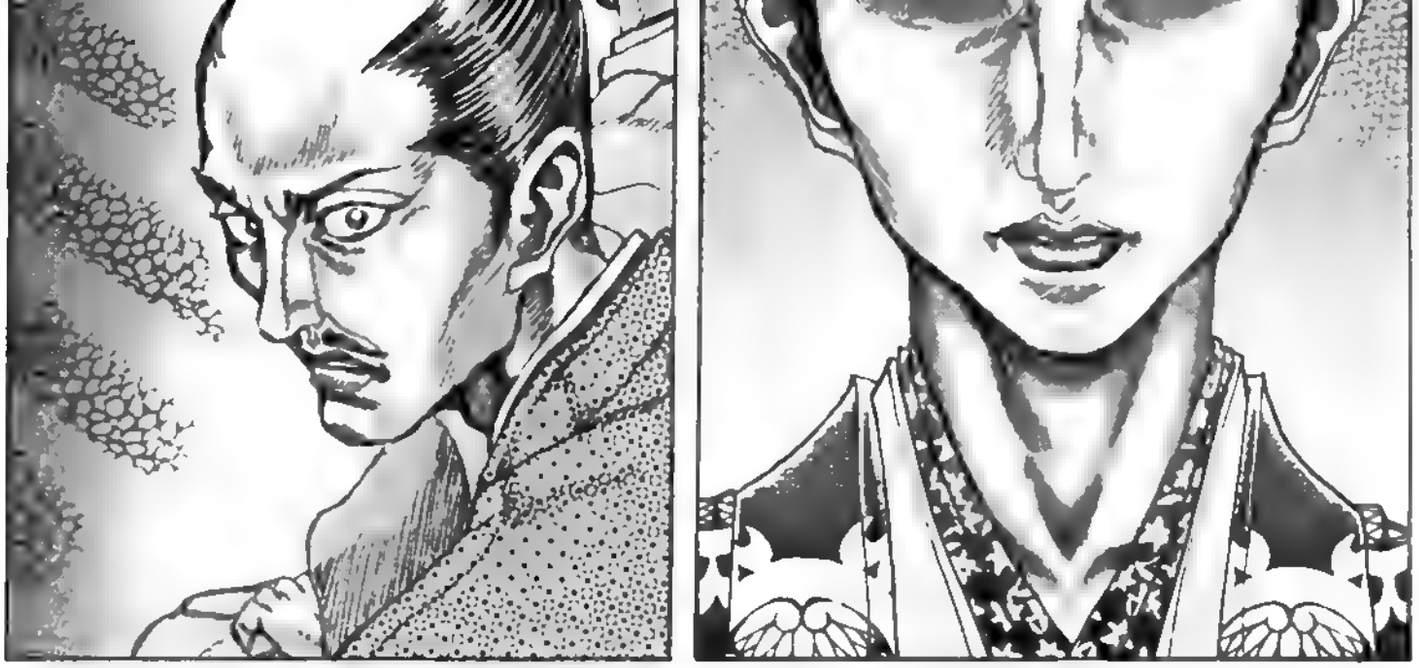

THAT ENVY HAD TURNED TO MALICE.
HAD NOT THE BEAUTIFUL SWORDS-MAN'S TWO EYES BEEN SLASHED?

ALL WHO ENCOUN-TERED SEIGEN HAD HAD THEIR HEARTS,
STOLEN BY THAT BRIGHT-NESS



*Bodhisattva, a Buddhist term for one who has reached enlightenment and transcended earthly concerns



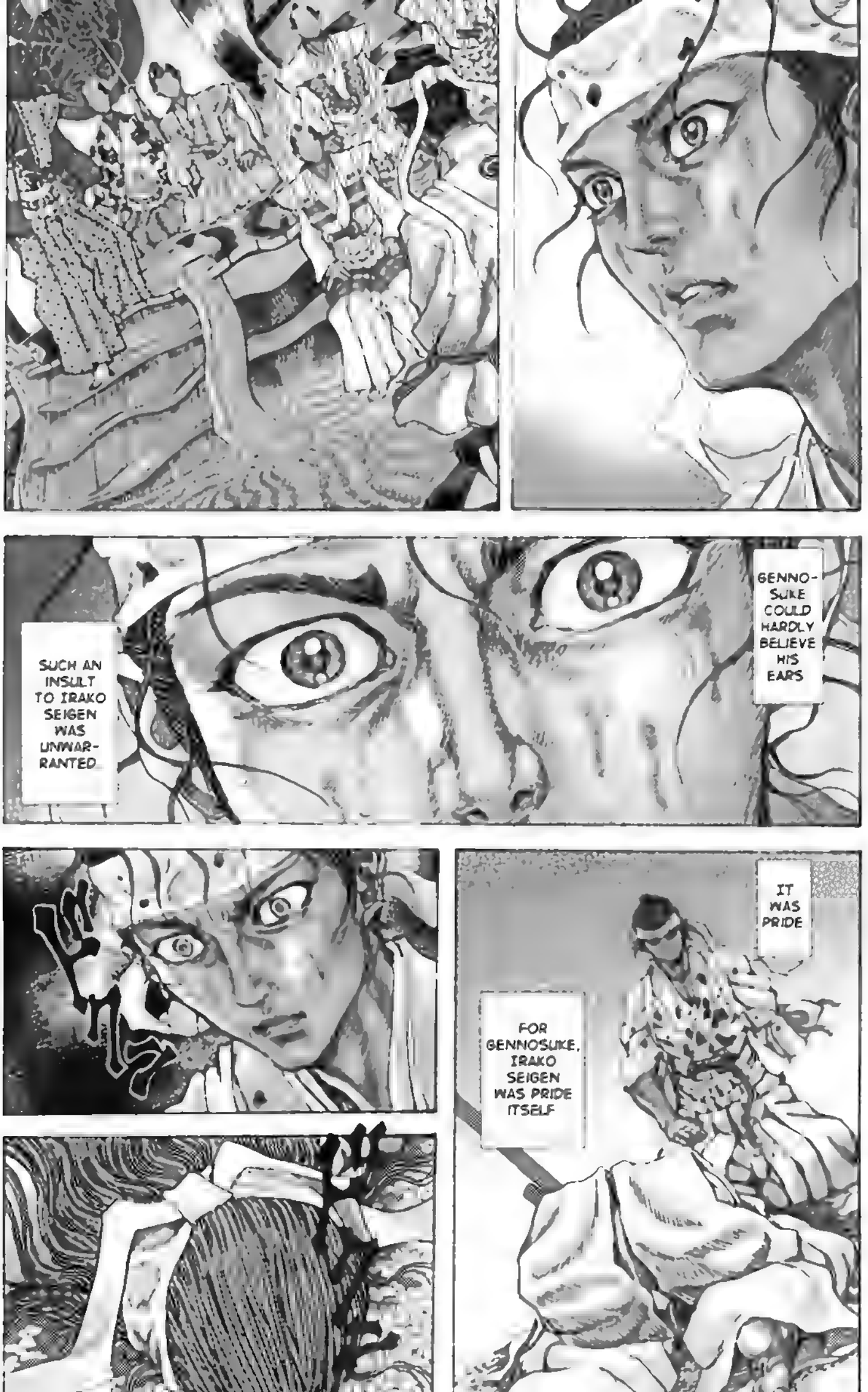


FUJIKI GENNO-SUKE!

YOU HAVE BROUGHT DOWN SEIGEN.
HOW ADMIR-ABLY.

SEIGEN, A MERE MEMBER OF THE TOUDOUZA, HAD THE EFFRONTERY TO SULLY THE SACRED DUELING GROUND.
FOR THAT REASON, OUR LORD HAD ALREADY DECIDED TO SUBJECT HIM TO TE-UCHI* BEFORE LONG.
CUT OFF HIS HEAD IMMEDIATELY,
AND STICK IT ON A PIKE!

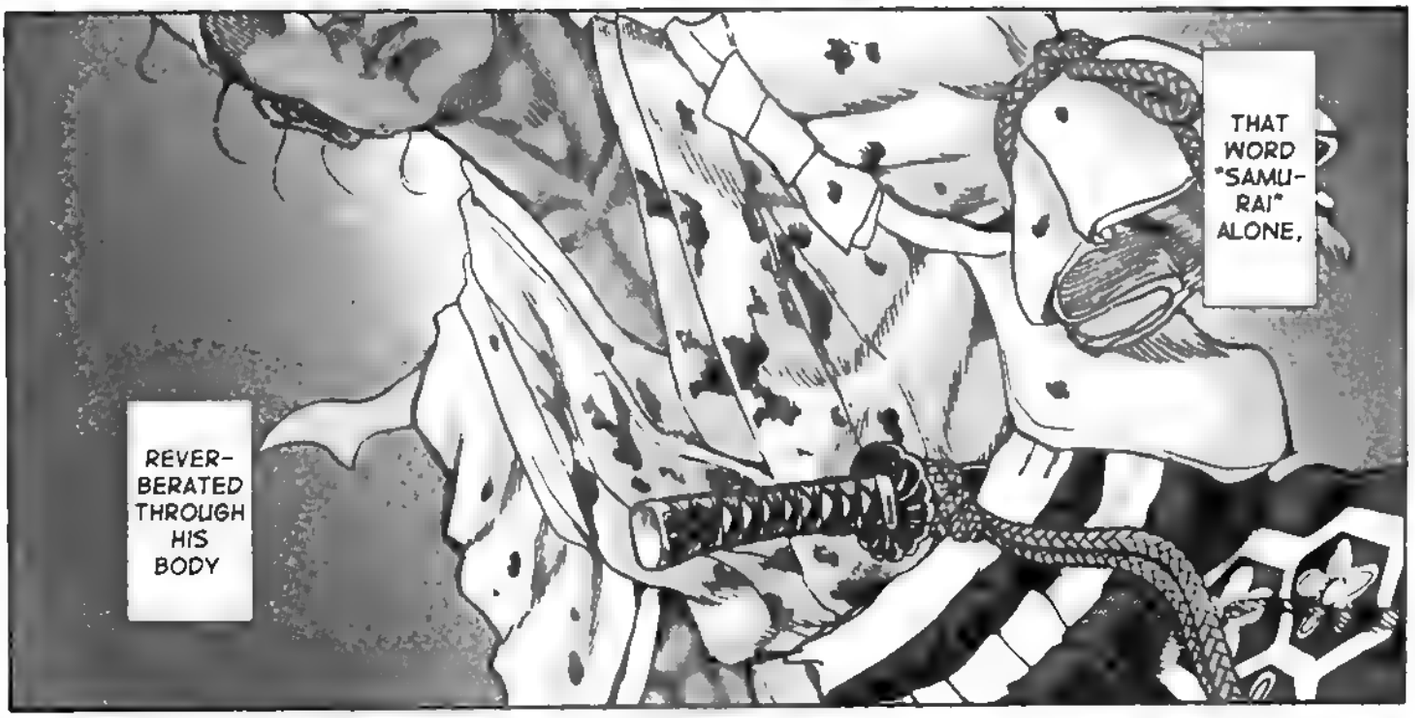
*The practice of [illegible] personally executing a vassal who had insulted or betrayed him.


SUCH AN INSULT TO IRAKO SEIGEN WAS UNWARRANTED
GENNOSUKE COULD HARDLY BELIEVE HIS EARS
IT WAS PRIDE
FOR GENNOSUKE, IRAKO SEIGEN WAS PRIDE ITSELF

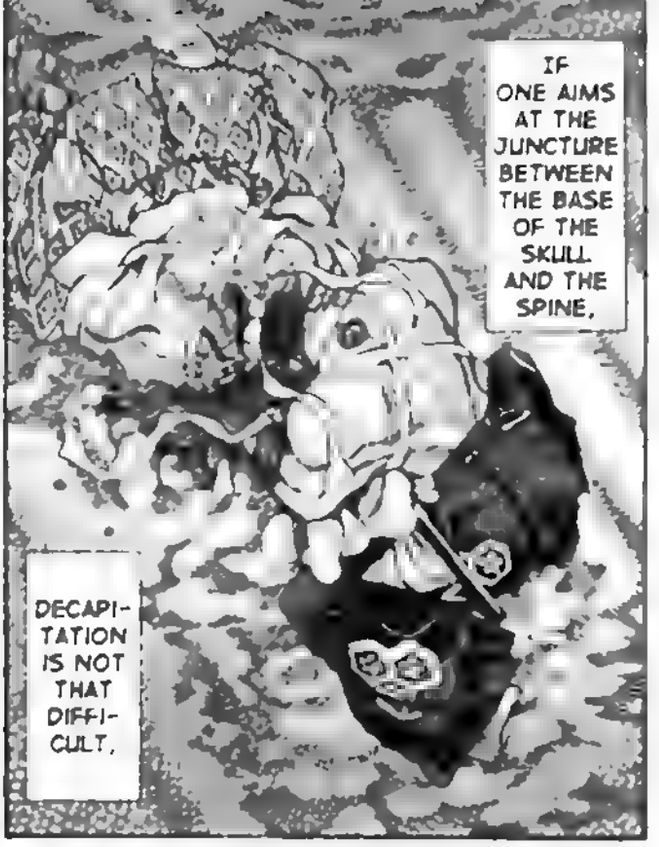
FUJIKI GENNO-SUKE!
DO NOT HESITATE!
IT IS THE WAY OF THE SAMURAI TO TAKE THE HEAD OF A DEFEATED ENEMY ON THE BATTLEGROUND.

SAMURAI...
YOU MUST CARRY OUT THE DUTY OF A SAMURAI!
IF YOU ARE A SAMURAI,

BUT GENNO-SUKE DID NOT ATTEND
SAEGUSA, LORD OF IZU, CONTINUED SHOUTING,

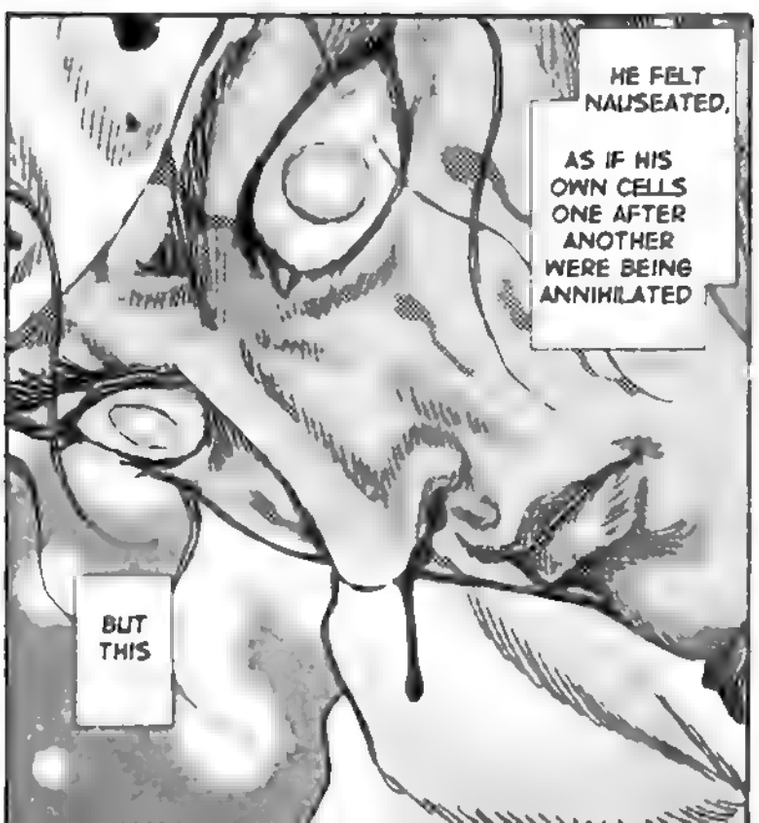

REVER-BERATED THROUGH HIS BODY
THAT WORD "SAMU-RAI" ALONE,

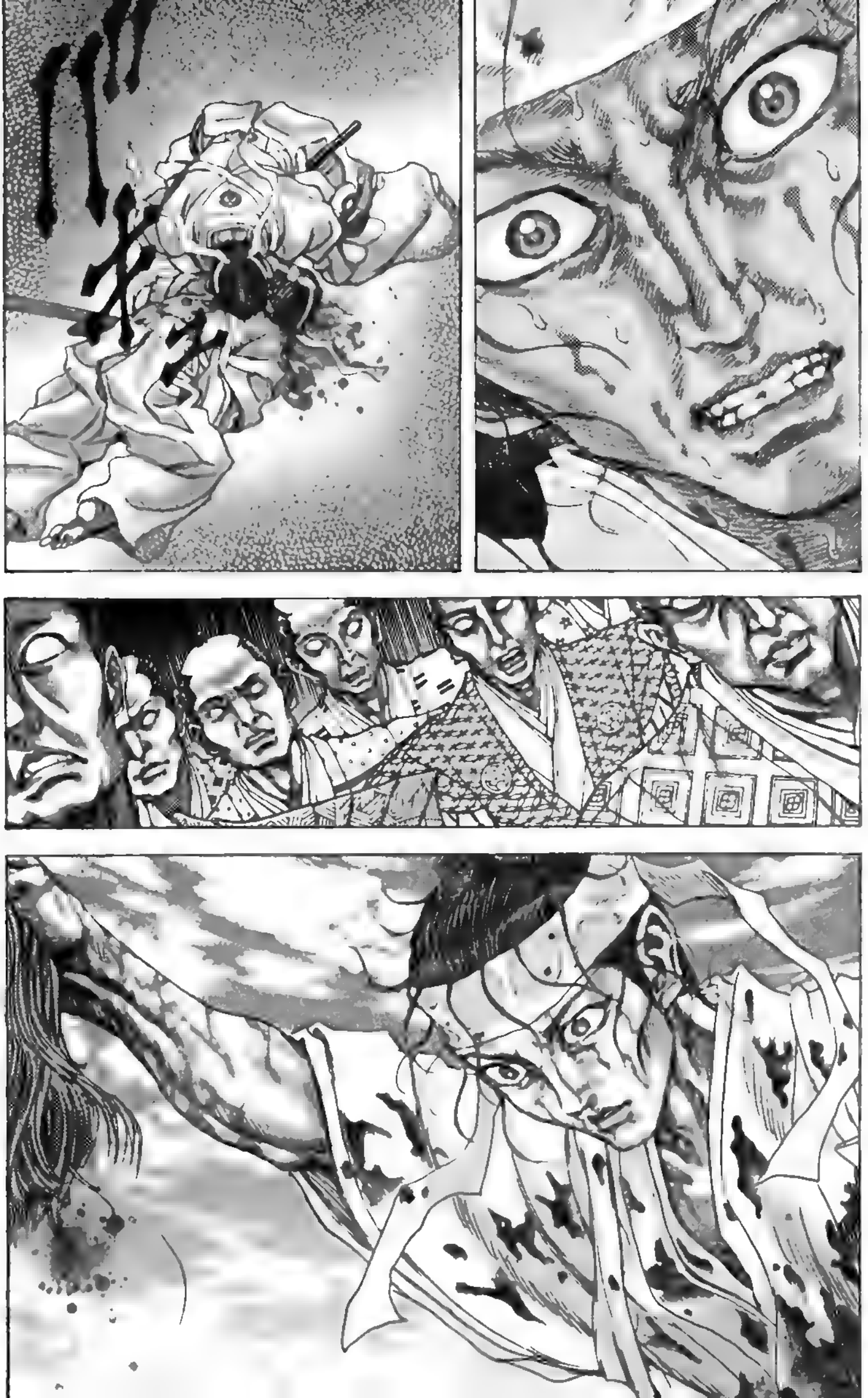
BUT GENNO-SUKE,
COULD MUSTER NO MORE STRENGTH THAN A BABY


IF ONE AIMS AT THE JUNCTURE BETWEEN THE BASE OF THE SKULL AND THE SPINE,
DECAPI-TATION IS NOT THAT DIFFI-CULT.

HE COULD ONLY HACK WITH HIS SWORD AS IF HE WERE SAWING WOOD.

HE GREW PALE,
AND TREM-BLED WITH THE STRAIN


HE FELT NAUSEATED,
AS IF HIS OWN CELLS ONE AFTER ANOTHER WERE BEING ANNIHILATED
BUT THIS



I
APPROVE.

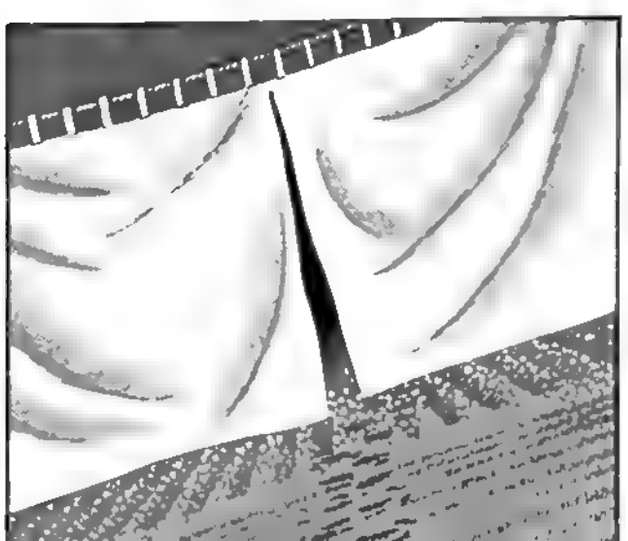
FUJIKI GENNO-SUKE.

FOR THIS SPLENDID ACTION YOU HAVE RECEIVED WORDS OF THANKS FROM OUR LORD.

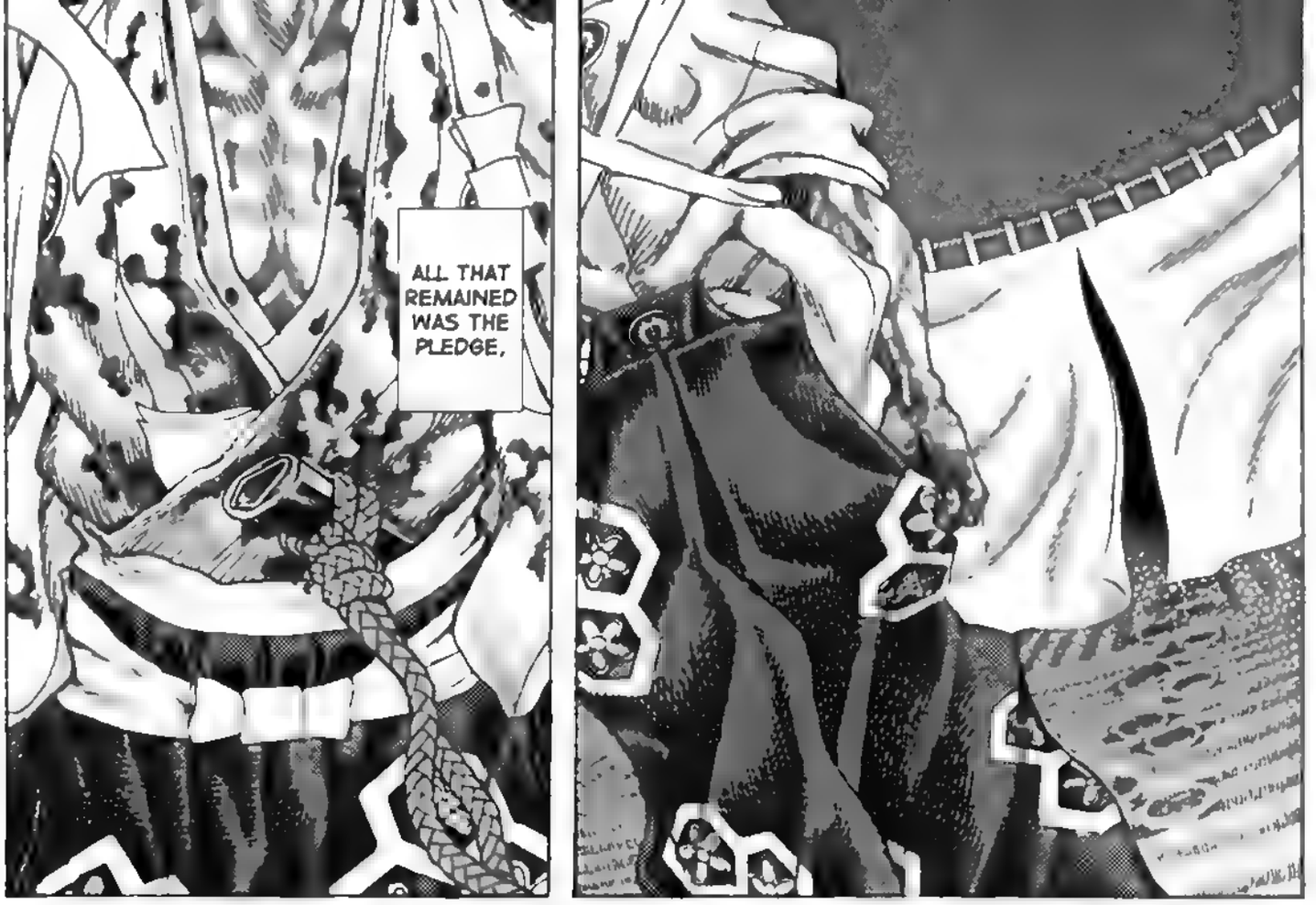
THIS GREAT DEBT WILL BY NO MEANS BE FORGOTTEN. FROM THIS DAY FORWARD YOU MUST OFFER YOUR LIFE TO OUR LORD!
AS A SIGN OF HIS EXCEPTIONAL APPROVAL, YOU SHALL BE GIVEN EMPLOYMENT IN SUNPU CASTLE.

PROS-
TRATING
HIMSELF,
GENNO-
SUKE
VOMITED.

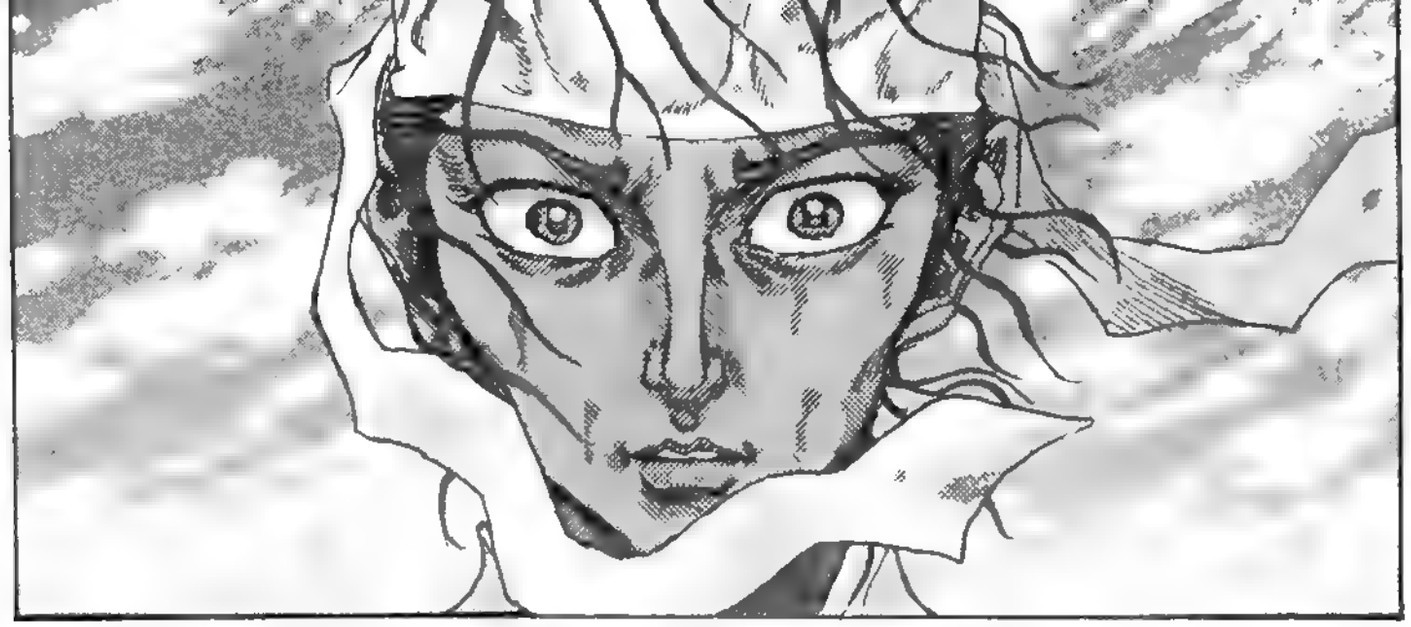
ALL HAD BEEN STOLEN FROM HIM.



DEPARTING THE TOURNA-MENT GROUNDS,
GENNO-SUKE LOOKED LIKE A DIFFERENT PERSON FROM WHEN HE ENTERED.


ALL THAT REMAINED WAS THE PLEDGE,

WITH THE MAIDEN.



MIE-
SAMA.

Mumyo Sakanagare Chapter
～THE END～

I was certainly very pleased to tell him how much his works had fascinated me. At the same time, however, I realized how arrogant I was to tell him that in creating a graphic adaptation, I intended to change the title and significantly alter the work that he had already polished. Not to mention that I also intended to make the first match the whole of the story, and that it would be carried in a magazine that had just published its first issue and was still struggling to become established in the marketplace.

In the end, my fears were unfounded. It was perhaps less than that I managed to communicate to him my sincere passion for *Suruga-jou Gozen Jiai* than that he indulged me in everything because I was so young. The age difference between us was more than half a century, and he had never directed his keen insight as an author to such a novice.

"You know nothing of hardship," his smiling face seemed to say. Apologizing all the while, I drank my fill of carbonated beverages provided by the maestro.

When chapter one of the new serial *Shigurui* was complete, once again I brazenly called on Mr. Nanjou and asked him to pose for a photograph that could be used in the collected volume.

I knelt formally on the floor beside the great man, seated deeply in his chair, but he clapped me on the shoulder and invited me to sit closer.

Those are my thoughts on Nanjou Norio.

July 2010

On Nanjou Norio, by Yamaguchi Takayuki

I first encountered Nanjou Norio's novels in my late teens.

Although he wrote tales of samurai in the warring states period, the raw emotions in his work are clearly informed by his vivid recollections of the tragic events of the Pacific War, still recent at the time of writing. It was evident to me that his use of violent, bloody words like "torture," "decapitation," "crucifixion," had a basis in the reality of his brutal experiences in mainland Asia during the war.

A student of history, Nanjou Norio stated, "Most of Japan's history is written from the perspective of its rulers. Even though there were commoners who desperately resisted, those who were able to oppress them the most completely are praised as excellent politicians." His novels encourage us to think about those who have been entirely forgotten, and might be thought of as part of the struggle to restore the dignity of the oppressed.

In early summer 2002, my editor and I met with Mr. Nanjou in order to obtain permission to use *Suruga-jou Gozen Jiai* for my adaptation. I felt nervous and excited and uneasy.

シグルイ shigurui

Mumyo Sakanagare Chapter